

# CREOLIZING HEGEL



EDITED BY  
MICHAEL MONAHAN

# Creolizing Hegel

## CREOLIZING THE CANON

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INTERNATIONAL  
*London • New York*

Published by Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd  
Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB  
www.rowmaninternational.com  
Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd. is an affiliate of Rowman & Littlefield

4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706, USA

With additional offices in Boulder, New York, Toronto (Canada), and Plymouth (UK)  
www.rowman.com

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### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: HB 978-1-78660-023-3

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Monahan, Michael J., editor.

Title: Creolizing Hegel / edited by Michael Monahan.

Description: Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017. |

Series: Creolizing the canon | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016046582 (print) | LCCN 2016051974 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781786600233 (cloth: alk. paper) | ISBN 9781786600257 (electronic)


Subjects: LCSH: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770–1831. |

Philosophy—Caribbean Area.

Classification: LCC B2948.C68 2017 (print) | LCC B2948 (ebook) |

DDC 193—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016046582>

 The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America



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## Acknowledgments

I would like to briefly acknowledge the effort and support of those who helped to bring this project to fruition. The contributors to this volume provided rich material and were wonderful collaborators with whom to work. My thanks in addition to those I enlisted to help with the blind review of contributors' submissions. My profound thanks also to the Caribbean Philosophical Association, which nurtured and supported the development of key ideas of this text. Thanks also go to the *Creolizing the Canon* series editors, Jane Anna Gordon and Neil Roberts, for their enthusiastic support of this project (and the profound gift of their friendship), as well as the blind reviewers of the book proposal. The staff at Rowman & Littlefield International have been ideal colleagues at every stage in the realization of this project, and I offer my heartfelt thanks to all there who helped make this possible.





# Introduction

## *What Is Rational Is Creolizing*

Michael Monahan

A body of work theorizing creolization, and creolizing theory, has emerged out the intellectual community of the Caribbean Philosophical Association in recent years. This burgeoning philosophical movement has been garnering interest within and beyond the Caribbean, as evidenced in part by the creation of the book series *Creolizing the Canon*, of which the present volume is a part. This series is a significant testament to the vitality of this philosophical movement and offers a critical venue for further developing and articulating that movement. In this vein, *Creolizing Hegel* is above all an attempt to bring the *praxis* of creolization as a philosophical movement to bear on Hegel's corpus and to in turn bring Hegelian thought to bear on that praxis (dialectically, one might even say). In this introduction, I will begin by offering an account of creolization as a philosophical movement and as the organizing theme of this volume. Next I will argue, primarily through an appeal to Hegel's writings on logic, that the Hegelian account of reason can be understood as itself essentially creolizing. That is, this volume is neither an uncomfortable imposition of "marginal" texts, figures, and methods on Hegel's intellectual legacy (adding a splash of "color" and "spice" to an otherwise austere palette) on the one hand, nor the unwelcome colonization of marginalized thinkers by a paradigmatic "great white theorist" on the other. On the contrary, I will argue that even when Hegel did not enact it himself, his system is fundamentally creolizing, and in this way Hegelian thought should be understood as in a significant way allied with, or at least useful to, the creolization of theory. Indeed, as the subtitle of this introduction claims, I will argue that while what is creolizing is not always rational, what is rational, at least in Hegel's sense, is always creolizing.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I will conclude by describing how this volume will take up the task of creolizing Hegel and briefly describe the individual contributions and their broader themes.

## ON CREOLIZATION AS MOVEMENT AND PRAXIS

In order to express the sense of creolization at work in this volume, it is important to spell out the relation between *descriptive* creolization and *prescriptive* or *normative* creolization. That is, common to all the works articulating creolization as a philosophical or theoretical movement is the claim that creolization is not merely a phenomenon that emerges when various social forces (both nefarious and benign) bring together otherwise distinct and disparate peoples and cultures (understood broadly here to include languages, aesthetic practices, religious expressions, and philosophical traditions). It is surely that, but we further mean it to intend the idea that creolization is a positive good or disposition toward which we *ought* to direct our theoretical, political, and aesthetic *praxis*. This latter, normative sense of creolization is clearly linked to the former, more descriptive sense. Since this more descriptive sense in which diverse peoples and cultures are brought together in new ways is likely to be more familiar to the reader, I will begin my account there.

As Gordon points out in her detailed discussion of descriptive creolization, the term *creole* emerged in the sixteenth century to name people of mixed blood, while *creolization* was a later nineteenth-century concept applied to symbolic and cultural systems more generally (Gordon 2014, 169). Thus, in this descriptive mode, and particularly in the biological context, the concept of the *creole* picks out someone whose ancestry is in some significant sense fragmented—the family tree pointing back not to a single “trunk,” but rather to a fractured set of roots emerging from disparate natal soils. It was, in this way, closely linked with the development of modern biological notions of *race*, since the “mixture” relevant to notions of creolization were fundamentally racial, rather than strictly national or religious. On a more cultural footing, the *creole* picks out languages, religious practices, symbols, and so forth, that, in a way analogous to the biological sense of the term, have their “foundations” in different cultural sources. *Creolization*, put simply, refers to the processes that create and nurture the *creole* as a biological or cultural development.

The appeal to creolization being deployed in the context of theory is predicated more upon the model of cultural/linguistic creolization rather than the more biological notion. In fact, much of what is emphasized in this literature is the way in which creolization generates not predictable sums of constitutive component parts, but rather yields unpredictable and new hybridities that relatively quickly develop to the point that they can no longer be reduced to the sum of their original “parts.” Glissant makes this point very clearly, and so I quote him at length:

Thus it is easy to see why creolization, and not métissage or crossbreeding, accurately describes the process originated by the contacts and conflicts of

cultures in the countries being discussed here. Creolization is unpredictable, whereas the immediate results of crossbreeding are more or less predictable. . . . Furthermore, creolization opens on a radically new dimension of reality, not on a mechanical combination of components, characterized by value percentages. Therefore, creolization, which overlaps with linguistic production, does not produce direct synthesis, but *résultantes*, results: something else, another way. (1995, 83)

Thus, even in its more descriptive mode, as an account of the processes of cultural encounter and migration (both voluntary and involuntary), creolization points toward an open-ended and unpredictable process predicated upon the generation of the new, and the *forgetting* of the old. Again, listen to Glissant speaking about the creolization of language in the Caribbean:

The reason is that, in addition to this necessity for circumvention, creole language contributes another, internal, necessity: that is, the obligation to remake oneself every time on the basis of a series of forgettings. Forgetting, that is to say, integration, of what the language is based upon: the multitude of African languages, on the one hand, and of European languages, on the other—the nostalgia for what is left of the Caribs. (1995, 86)

In my own work, I emphasize creolization as a manifestation of ambiguity in the face of an always-mythical purity (more on this later), and even here, there is an ambiguity. For Glissant is surely correct that there is a forgetting at work in processes of creolization, but it is also a preservation (this should be a familiar concept for those readers comfortable with Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*). A creolized language or religious practice, for instance, is at once made possible and conditioned by a forgetting of the prior linguistic or religious *root* practices. But at the same time, these roots are preserved in the new language or practice, present and identifiable to those who know what to look for, in the same way that we can see traces of our grandparents in our facial features. The Christian and Yoruba roots of *Santería*, for example, are both recognizable, even though *Santería* is not reducible to either, nor simply a mathematical result of their addition. *Santería* has in this sense “forgotten” Christianity and traditional Yoruba religious practices, but it also, in important ways, remembers and preserves them. In this descriptive mode, then, we can see creolization as an ambiguous forgetting/preserving that generates new and unpredictable practices that cannot be reduced to the sum of their components, as Alexis Nouss reminds us, in a simple arithmetic of “parts” (2015, 64–65).

Before moving from the descriptive to the prescriptive understanding of creolization, one more crucial insight from Glissant needs to be emphasized. He points out that “ambiguity, discontinuity, traces, and remembering, creolization,

with its unpredictable results, are not signs of weakness” (1995, 87). The system-oriented thinking that Glissant identifies with Europe aims at an exhaustive, ordered, and unified whole, where everything has its place. But there are, he suggests, “Archipelago places,” where an “openness to the other” can moderate the thought of systems characteristic of “the continent” (1995, 89). From within these creolizing Archipelago places, “chaos is beautiful; not chaos born from hate and wars, but from the extraordinary complexity of the exchange between cultures, which may yet forge future Americas that are at last and for the first time both deeply unified and truly diversified” (ibid.). Creolization, in other words, offers an opportunity to see hybridity and ambiguity as a strength, rather than a weakness, and to conceive of a unity born of openness to others, rather than conquest (both real and metaphorical).

It is important to bear in mind, while we remain in the descriptive mode, that the positive aspects of creolization highlighted by Glissant are not necessary or universal features. Creolization has historically shown itself to be susceptible to the kinds of “continental” system-thought that he critiques. Those familiar with the history of *mestizo* identities in Latin America,<sup>2</sup> with the *creole* middle class in the French Caribbean, or the *Coloured* population in the Western Cape of South Africa will see instances of the articulation of the *creole* identity as every bit a sort of monolithic and *pure* category in its own right. To make matters worse, such identities have often disavowed important elements of their genesis for the sake of a particular genealogical narrative. *Mestizaje* often ignores African contributions, for example. We must be careful, therefore, not to overstate the laudatory aspects of creolization. For, as I have argued elsewhere, once we articulate an identity as *mestizo*, *creole*, or even “mixed” that is defined *in opposition* to the constitutive elements that engender it, then the ambiguity, dynamism, and openness that characterize the *processes* of creolization that Glissant praises is lost (Monahan 2011, 168–75). Indeed, if that openness, ambiguity, and dynamism is precisely what is most valuable about processes of creolization, then any effort to fix, define, and demarcate its boundaries must be viewed with suspicion.

The appeal of the metaphor of creolization in the context of theory should be evident at this point, and it is in this context that I wish to explore the *prescriptive* understanding of creolization. If one takes the position that there is something valuable in creolization as a historical phenomenon, or as a metaphor for intellectual practices, what, exactly, is it that one is endorsing? Historically, creolization has often been the result of traumatic and devastating upheavals of peoples and cultures resulting from conquest, enslavement, forced migration, and exploitation. Those of us advocating a prescriptive account of creolization are certainly *not* endorsing continuation of such practices in any form. Nor, as Gordon points out, are we advocating hybridity or mixture for its own sake (Gordon 2014, 3), or as simple celebration of

diversity (Gordon 2014, 7). All well and good, but if we make calls to “creolize theory,” “creolize the canon,” or “creolize philosophy,” which we all have, then what, exactly, are we calling for?

One thing that should be made clear from the start is that there is a kind of irony in this advocacy, insofar as the alleged purity or lack of hybridity in all of these domains has only ever been mythological (Gordon 2014, 13; Monahan 2011, 163–64). It is, for instance, through the disavowal of “outside” influences and interactions, and the repetition of the mythology of a *sui generis* European intellectual tradition that the very idea of a non-creolized foundation for our intellectual practices exists in the first place. Thus, there is an aspect of our work that urges the reader to recognize and reclaim the ways in which creolization has always been the reality and purity has always been mythic. In the context of philosophy, we must, for example, recall and take seriously the influence of Egyptian and Persian thought on the ancient Greeks, the tremendous impact of Islamic philosophers, many of them of African ancestry, on medieval European thought, and so forth. While all of this is an important part of the praxis of creolization relevant here, it is not only restricted to this historically oriented recovery of a creolized past, but also looks to the present and future.

One way to understand the prescriptive mode of creolization that looks toward the future is by way of contrast. While creolization is in fact the historical norm (though an often disavowed one), there are practices and commitments that are, in Gordon’s terms, “decreolizing” and, in my own terms, take up the “politics of purity”—practices that aim toward conceptual, cultural, or methodological *purity* in one form or another. The politics of purity describes an impulse toward the enforcement of rigid and static borders across a variety of domains, including the biological, geographic, cultural, and even (most crucial to my engagement with Hegel here) conceptual/logical (Monahan 2011, 181, 201–2). As Gordon understands the term, therefore, “decreolizing” practices manifest the politics of purity, but Gordon and I agree that the response cannot be to *aim* at creolization (Gordon 2014, 184; Monahan 2011, 207–8). That is, like Aristotelian *Eudaimonea*, creolization in this sense is not something that can be one’s explicit goal, but rather must emerge through the pursuit of some larger and independent aim. As Gordon makes the point:

With theory as with politics, creolizing will not emerge when it is deliberately pursued. It will instead be the inevitable outcome when we recall a larger *telos*, in this instance, a galvanizing concern with understanding, forging, and protecting a distinct domain of political life so long as we are not straight-jacketed by commitments that would frame creolizing itself . . . as illicit. (Gordon 2014, 7)

Calls for the creolization of theory, in short, are not calls to engage in a particular practice or even a particular method, but rather are a call for a kind

of *openness* in relation to practices and methods. Creolization of theory will, in this view, be a kind of inevitable outcome of an effort to understand the already complicated and creolized subjects once one abandons pretensions of and commitments to *purity*. The creolizing of theory as a practice would thus mean seeing the bringing together of allegedly distinct sources and methods not as a kind of corruption of disciplinary purity or failure of intellectual rigor, “but [as] the charting of a new moment in [the discipline’s] genealogy, one in which its terms might be reenlivened particularly because they are not jettisoned but resituated so they are continuous and made new” (Gordon 2014, 197). It remains, therefore, to raise the question of whether there are types of aims that are more or less conducive to creolization.

One question that emerges at this point is about the kinds of goals or aims that engender creolization in this prescriptive form. What, in other words, are the *teloi* that stand the best chance of yielding creolizing methodologies and practices, if creolization as such is not our *telos*? Or perhaps better yet, what characteristics might such *teloi* share? Another important but distinct puzzle takes up the question of the *telos* of creolization as such. If we are prescribing creolization in some sense or another, toward what end are we making this prescription? To return to a focus on the present volume, what is the aim of “Creolizing the Canon” in general and “Creolizing Hegel” in particular?

One way that I have characterized the answer to the first question, and one that I take to be very much in keeping with the theme of this volume, is that creolizing practices and methodologies are most likely to emerge when we make *liberation* our aim. Not the liberation of liberal political thought, but rather the notion of liberation that I believe motivates the work of Hegel and his successors, including Karl Marx, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre (especially his later work), and Frantz Fanon. That is, an understanding of liberation that sees it not merely as the absence of “external” constraint (which requires a clear, distinct, and stable border between the self and the other, and thus as an effort to “purify” the self),<sup>3</sup> but rather as a *commitment* to the ongoing and dynamic development of human agency in oneself and others (and one that, importantly, sees the border between the self and the other as already complicated and blurry—as creolized, in a sense).<sup>4</sup> When we dedicate our efforts to understanding oppression and articulating and working toward liberation, the border-policing, one-upsmanship, and empty posturing that tends to characterize the age of “disciplinary decadence” (Gordon 2006, 28–35) will reveal themselves as the ultimately wasteful and oppressive tendencies that they are (the meetings of most professional academic associations provide ample opportunity to witness this phenomenon). *This* kind of commitment to liberation demands an openness on the part of the agent to ambiguity, dynamism, and hybridity first and foremost because it recognizes that it is a *human* endeavor to understand and foster *humanity*. As already



ambiguous and dynamic phenomena ourselves, any effort to narrowly focus and constrain the methods we deploy to understand ourselves and others will necessarily *mischaracterize* the very object of study it claims to illuminate. The politics of purity, in other words, is *dehumanizing* in the most literal sense of the term.

As for the second question about the *telos* of creolization as such, just as creolizing practices will not emerge from taking creolizing to be our explicit aim, creolization overall is not an end in itself. Indeed, part of the insight of creolizing intellectual practices is the explicit recognition that purity—of cultures, of disciplines, of practices—has always only ever been a myth, and creolization, though certainly to very different degrees and in different ways, has been the reality that, in a sense, dare not speak its name when purity is the norm. However, if we imagine that creolization might aim at some end goal where all boundaries have disappeared and everything is maximally hybrid, then we are positing an end state where creolization is no longer possible (because there is no longer difference or distinction *to creolize*), and where human difference has ceased to be altogether. The *telos* of creolization, consequently, must entail the fostering of a more genuinely *human* world, where humanity is itself understood to be a hybrid, ambiguous, and dynamic process of ongoing creolization, but where each moment of creolization stands as the open possibility or even *invitation* to yet further such moments. Creolization in this prescriptive sense thus aims for a world in which the possibilities for human expression and freedom are constantly opening up to new horizons of possibility.

The answer to both questions, then, is that creolization points toward a *telos* without a terminus. Just as liberation cannot be properly understood as a *state* to be achieved, so too is creolization, in this prescriptive sense, never something that we may accomplish and refer to as a *fait accompli* but can only ever be a kind of norm that conditions our efforts without determining them. The call for creolizing political theory offered by Gordon, or my own call for creolizing *subjects*, is thus not directed toward some static terminus as an end state but rather points toward the characteristics of methods and practices that at once recognize and foster the fundamentally *human* practices of creolization. It is an intellectual framework that foregrounds the ambiguity and hybridity that is understood not as a weakness or obstacle to our political or epistemic efforts but rather as the condition for the possibility of human existence *as freedom*.

To “creolize the canon,” therefore, points toward several interrelated goals and processes. The first, and more backward-looking aim, is to reveal and indeed affirm the ways in which the intellectual canon as a whole has never been a pure, self-contained, and discrete entity, nor have the individual key figures that comprise it. Second, creolizing the canon calls for the decentering

of canonical texts, figures, and traditions from the normative hegemony that they tend to enjoy. That is, there is a tendency when studying non-Western<sup>5</sup> figures to read them *through* (almost to the point of being *reducible* to) some Western figure or tradition. Non-Western theory thus gains legitimacy by being directly analogous to some canonical Western theory. Thus, to the extent that it is worth taking seriously, one should be able to *translate* it directly into Western terms.<sup>6</sup> Creolization calls for a recognition that this idea of direct translatability is a forlorn ideal, and we should instead be looking at the ways in which our understanding of those dominant Western ideas are altered in productive ways by being placed alongside and in dialog with non-Western ideas. To use Hegel as an example, the idea here would be not simply that we get a better understanding of Fanon by seeing how he is *Hegelian*, but that our understanding of Hegel can be deepened by seeing how he is and is not *Fanonian*. The bringing together of diverse figures, if it is to be creolizing in the relevant sense, must in the end alter our reading of both figures, yielding a new hybrid, and ambiguous, understanding of the figures and the ideas they discuss.

This means that a call for the creolization of the canon is not a call for the utter dismissal or rejection of it. It certainly eschews any myopic focus on the Western canon, as well as the refusal to take up “translating” projects that simply read the non-Western into the Western, but to completely abandon the Western canon would not be creolizing, but rather would reinforce the idea of the *purity* of the categories of the Western and non-Western by emphasizing the non-Western exclusively. The *modus operandi* of the creolization of the canon is thus to place canonical figures within and among texts, figures, and traditions that are normally understood to be outside of the canon *as equals*. If we take seriously the idea that the Western canon has in fact in many ways been shaped and influenced by non-Western ideas (that it is not nearly as pure as it pretends), yet this fact has been so often disavowed precisely in order to shore up the hegemony of the canon, then one can argue that creolizing the canon is in fact a hermeneutically sound maneuver.<sup>7</sup> In other words, we better understand these texts when we take seriously their hidden ancestry, and we reveal greater depth of meaning by placing them in dialog with what would normally be considered *strange*. Those committed to the idea of the purity and even sanctity of the canon will see this as abandoning it, and to the extent that one equates the canon with this *mythos*, it is indeed being abandoned.<sup>8</sup> The point, ultimately, is that it is the myth of purity surrounding the canon that is being rejected and dismissed, not the texts and figures of canon in themselves.<sup>9</sup>

The project of creolizing Hegel thus involves uprooting him from the pristine and often sterile soil of the mythologized canon and placing him in unfamiliar contexts and in conversation with unorthodox interlocutors. This

creolization of Hegel need not be understood in strictly racial, ethnic, or nationalist terms but can include locating him any kind of unfamiliar territory where he must *adapt* in order to survive, so to speak. Reading Hegel in contexts that prioritize feminist concerns, varieties of sexuality, environmental degradation, or modern conditions of enslavement would all have the potential to be creolizing in a manner appropriate to this volume. The aim is thus to introduce Hegelian insights and texts to contexts where he is not typically read (and may indeed be viewed with greater or lesser degrees of hostility), while at the same time revealing and exploring the ways in which this “travelling” alters and enlivens our reading of Hegel himself. This latter point is what is essential to creolizing as it is understood here—the practice of creolizing can never leave the participants unchanged and static. This is a major contrast with typical “comparative” philosophical endeavors. To compare and contrast Hegel and Biko, or Hegel and Anzaldúa, simply takes up two discrete topics and preserves them in their distinctness. Creolizing, on the other hand, alters the topics but not beyond recognition. Just as, in the descriptive mode, the creolization of a language or cultural practice importantly preserves the constitutive elements in the creolized form, creolizing Hegel alters and shifts our reading of Hegel, yet not necessarily to the point that he can no longer be recognized. The result of this process should be that Hegel scholars will still recognize Hegel in his creolized forms, while readers less familiar with and/or sympathetic to Hegel will find new inspiration both for their own projects and for returning to or reconsidering Hegel.

## CREOLIZATION AND THE MOVEMENT OF REASON

Hegel certainly occupies a particularly significant place in the Western canon, and is quite frequently cast as the villain or foil for post-war intellectual and political movements. In “analytic” philosophy, he is a paradigm of “idealism,” obscurantism, and grand system-building. In “continental” philosophy he looms as a progenitor with whom one must, inevitably, come to terms, either placing oneself somewhere within his legacy or critiquing him as the great metaphysician. Within feminist theory and critical race theory, Hegel is often cast as the epitome of patriarchy and Eurocentrism—staunch defender and grand theorizer of the paterfamilias and of colonialism as a civilizing project. Within this context, taking up the project of “creolizing” Hegel raises serious concerns. First, given the things Hegel has written on race, anthropology, gender, and colonialism, can a creolizing reading of his work ever get off the proverbial ground? Second, to the extent that the project is feasible at all, is the result still recognizably *Hegelian*? My contention is that the aim of creolizing Hegel is not only feasible but, given what I take to be justifiable

understandings of both creolization and Hegel's own larger philosophical project, it is an imminently *Hegelian* project in its own right.

Key to my argument is Hegel's repeated emphasis on two key, and related, themes. First, he maintains a robust focus on dynamism, change, activity, and process over stasis and rigidity. Second, this fundamental dynamism is linked to a critical positioning of either/or binaries, which of necessity posit static categories with rigid boundaries. As I sketched the notion above, creolization is contrasted with various accounts of or commitments to purity. Purity, at its most basic level, requires a clear boundary between what is internal to the *pure* category and what is external to it (and would constitute an impurity), which means that the concept of purity requires exactly the sort of static, either/or thinking that Hegel takes to task throughout his writings on Logic. While I believe that this thematic is consistently found throughout Hegel's mature corpus, I will here focus exclusively on his writings on logic. This is both because it is there that Hegel lays bare the most fundamental conceptual articulation of and argument for these themes and, more practically, because a complete and thorough textual argument is beyond the scope of this brief introduction.

Throughout both the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic* Hegel is careful to distinguish between reason proper (*Vernunft*), on the one hand, and the understanding (*Verstand*), on the other. According to Hegel, "Thinking as *understanding* stops short at the fixed determinacy and its distinctness vis-à-vis other determinacies; such a restricted abstraction counts for the understanding as one that subsists on its own account, and [simply] is" (1991b, ¶80). In contrast, he goes on, "The *speculative* or *positively rational* apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the *affirmative* that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition" (1991b, ¶82). The understanding is thus characterized by an emphasis on arriving at fixed and determinate conclusions or definitions. It aims, in other words, at clear and distinct demarcation of discrete and static objects.<sup>10</sup> Reason, however, takes what Hegel sees as the overly abstract and static either/or thinking of the understanding and *rises* above them (1976, 46). This rising above, however, cannot be properly understood as itself arriving at some abstract and distinct state (of comprehension). As Hegel makes the point, speculative reason as this rising above the static either/or categories of the understanding "is not a quiescent third, but, precisely as this unity [of immediacy and mediation], is self-mediating *movement* and *activity*" (1976, 837, emphasis mine). It is the distinction between what is static and what is dynamic, therefore, that is at the heart of the difference between reason and the understanding.

Of course, those familiar with the history of Enlightenment German philosophy will recognize that Hegel owes this distinction in large part to Kant, who likewise portrayed reason and the understanding as different species, so

to speak, of mental activity. Indeed, Hegel is quite explicit in acknowledging his debt to Kant in this regard, and his efforts to distinguish his own view of reason and the understanding from Kant's is illustrative of precisely this emphasis on dynamism over stasis. In the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel engages in an extensive critique of Kant (1991b, ¶40–48), the thrust of which is the claim that Kant's critical philosophy was not ultimately critical enough (Beiser 2005, 156). Hegel was very much in agreement with the critical claim that "we accept only those beliefs that agree with the critical exercise of our own reason" (Beiser 2005, 157) but thought that Kant failed to subject his own insistence that knowledge of the true and real must be *unconditioned* to that very critical scrutiny. Kant argued that such unconditioned cognition is impossible through experience, which necessarily conditions our access to the thing-in-itself, and that even the categories of the understanding in the abstract, when subjected to critical scrutiny, yield contradiction (antimony). Hegel, however, states:

We must agree with [Kant's conclusion that the content of our knowledge is mere appearance] up to a point: finite thinking certainly has to do only with appearances. But this stage of appearance is not the end of it. On the contrary, there is still a higher land; but for the Kantian philosophy it remains an inaccessible beyond. (1991b, ¶60A1)

Hegel's move is not to show how we can access a truth and reality that Kant believes is beyond our grasp but rather to offer a conception of truth and reality that he believes to be more radically critical than Kant's. The Hegelian response to the challenge posed by Kant's critical philosophy, in other words, is not to articulate a way in which access to *things-in-themselves* becomes a possibility, but rather to deny that such access should be our goal in the first place (or is even a coherent aim in itself). If "things" are always dynamic and in-relation, then the idea that there is a "thing-in-itself" to be grasped is a chimera that can only lead to confusion. It remains appealing, Hegel thinks, only insofar as we remain trapped in the understanding and do not approach the question by way of genuine speculative reason.

For Hegel, it is a characteristic of the understanding that it aims for fixed and static determinations that generate either/or distinctions (1976, 52, 620, 639; 1991b, ¶32, ¶80, ¶214). Such an approach has its place, he claims, as the first moment of the logical, as the starting point from which the dialectic movement of speculative reason is able to begin its work, but even here, he warns us, we ought not think of the understanding itself as a static category, for that, too, would be to commit the error of failing to consider it in its *truth* (1991b, ¶79). As Kant saw quite clearly, the insistence on these discrete and static either/or categories ultimately yields contradiction and the antinomies of reason. Hegel, however, sees this as a beginning, rather than a dead end:

But ... it must be noted here again Kant stopped at the merely negative result (that how things are in themselves is unknowable), and did not penetrate to the cognition of the true and positive significance of the antinomies. This true and positive significance (expressed generally) is that everything actual contains opposed determinations within it, and in consequence the cognition and, more exactly, the comprehension of an object<sup>11</sup> amounts precisely to our becoming conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations. (1991b, ¶48A)

What is needed, Hegel insists, is to turn toward the dynamic *movement* of speculative reason, such that the either/or dualisms of the understanding open up in such a way that truth is revealed in the dynamic and productive tension between elements or moments that the understanding can only ever grasp as mutually exclusive opposites.

In both of his principle texts on logic, the culmination of his investigation, the “Idea” [*die Idee*] is expressed in terms of motion, process, and activity, rather than as a static end point. The recurring critical refrain of his discussions of the earlier moments of the speculative logic—“Being” and “Essence” [*Sein* and *Wesen*]<sup>12</sup>—is precisely that they are characteristic of the static “pictorial thinking” (1976, 639) of the understanding. The Idea, on the other hand, is quite different, as Hegel tells us in the *Encyclopaedia*:

The Idea is essentially *process*, because its identity is only the absolute and free identity of the Concept, because this identity is the absolute negativity and hence dialectical. The Idea is the course [*Verlauf*] in which the Concept (as the universality that is singularity) determines itself both to objectivity and to the antithesis against it. (1991b, ¶215)

He continues in the remark to the same section:

Since the Idea is (a) *process*, the expression of the Absolute as “the *unity* of the finite and the infinite, of thinking and being, etc.” is false (as we have often said); for “unity” expresses an abstract, *quietly* persisting identity.... The unity of the Idea ... has to be essentially distinguished from the Idea as *substance*. (1991b, ¶215R)

And again in the *Science of Logic*:

This *result* [of the speculative method] is therefore the *truth*. It is *equally* immediacy *and* mediation; but such forms of judgment as: the third *is* immediacy and mediation, or: *it is the unity* of them, are not capable of grasping it; for it is not a quiescent third, but, precisely as this unity, is self-mediating movement and activity. (1976, 837)

Hegel is thus insistent that speculative logic, and the truth it yields, is thoroughly dynamic. To *understand* that truth as a “result,” or as “substance,” is

thus to treat it as a static *fait accompli*, and in this way miss what is most essentially true about it. This is why he refers to a proper, rational model of truth as more akin to familiarity than correspondence (1976, 172, 785; 1991b, ¶24A2, ¶33, ¶172A). That is, to see truth as a kind of correspondence between reality (the thing-in-itself) and representation is to remain at the level of the understanding, because this treats the elements that are or are not in correspondence as static and ultimately independent. Reality is *over there*, and my representation is *in here*, and the truth is simply a matter of their *identity*. Hegel understands this to be an inadequate understanding of truth and the function of reason.

If instead we follow Hegel in seeing the basic structures of thought and the world as fundamentally dynamic and relational (1991b, ¶89), and in this way themselves untenable as discrete categories, then traditional notions of truth that try to compare static and discrete elements will of necessity be insufficient. Hegel's answer is not to abandon truth altogether but to understand it more on the model of truth appropriate to the way we speak of a "true friend" (1991b, ¶24A2). He understands this to be a matter of agreement not between a representation and the real but rather the agreement of a thing with itself. To borrow his example, the *true* friend is a friend who lives up to the *concept* [*Begriff*] of friendship, where an untrue friend involves some "inner inadequacy" (ibid.). This example is important, because it points to the way in which the kind of truth appropriate to speculative reason is a matter of *activity*. That is, the truth of the friendship is revealed in the activity and behavior of the friend. One important implication of this is that the truth of the friendship is never settled in any definitive and static way. One's friend is true to the extent that she continues to behave in a manner consistent with the concept of friendship, but of course friendships decay, and the truth of her friendship must always be understood as ephemeral and contingent. Thus, "being" a true friend is a matter of *doing*, rather than the possession of certain (static) features, and as with any activity, beyond the moment when it is being manifest, its truth is no longer present but only potential (and therefore also potentially absent).

Another important implication revealed by this example is the way in which the truth of friendship is not a matter of being wholly or *purely* true. One feature of true friendship is made manifest in the way in which the true friend responds to challenges, setbacks, and failures to the health or flourishing of that friendship. Indeed, it is often when we emerge out of the most trying moments of a friendship that we are made most keenly aware of the depth of the *truth* of that friendship. The truth of a friendship, therefore, is both dynamic, and thus cannot be properly understood in the mode of static being (or as a *fait accompli*), and often ambiguous, and thus in a sense *needs* threats to or failures of friendship in order to most fully manifest. Hegel's claim is



that, beyond the abstractions of the *understanding*, truth must be understood as fundamentally dynamic, and often, in important ways, ambiguous. This is the case not only in terms of his own examples like “true friendship” or “true art” but also in any instantiation of truth proper to the most sophisticated (speculative) manifestations of reason. In the context of logic, for example, the syllogism, which Hegel sees as the “the *essential ground of everything true*,” occupies this privileged position because it is “the *cycle* [emphasis mine] of the mediation of its moments” (1991b, ¶181R). Any single element of the syllogism on its own is only a partial truth, neither is the sum of those elements the truth. Rather, it is not only the *relation* between the elements, yes, but also the “cycle”—the ongoing and *moving* relation between those parts—that makes them manifest truth in Hegel’s sense of the term.

This is quite clear in his discussions of contradiction, and especially his rejection of the principle of noncontradiction, which he dismisses by saying that it, “Instead of being a true law of thinking . . . is nothing but the law of the *abstract understanding*” (1991b, ¶115R). Neither the principle of noncontradiction, nor the law of excluded middle (1991b, ¶119R) can be maintained once the fixed and discrete *either/or* of the understanding is abandoned in favor of the dynamic and ambiguous *movement* of speculative reason. His claim, ultimately, is not just that speculative reason in the abstract reveals truth in and through contradictions but that such contradictions are in the very structure of the universe, so to speak. As he puts the point in the *Science of Logic*:

If, now, the first determinations of reflection, namely, identity, difference and opposition, have been put in the form of a law, still more should the determination into which they pass as their truth, namely, contradiction, be grasped and enunciated as a law: *everything is inherently contradictory*. . . . But it is one of the fundamental prejudices of logic as hitherto understood and of ordinary thinking, that contradiction is not so characteristically essential and immanent a determination as identity; but in fact if it were a question of grading the two determinations and they had to be kept separate, then contradiction would have to be taken as the profounder determination and more characteristic of essence. For as against contradiction, identity is merely the determination of the simple immediate, of dead being; but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity. (1976, 439, emphasis in original)

This appeal to the distinction between the living and the dead is quite telling. According to Hegel, speculative reason is to the understanding as a living organism is to a corpse. Life, as a process of development, decay, growth, health, and disease—in short, as a process of ongoing *change*—cannot possibly be comprehended in its truth by bringing a halt to that process. One way

to illustrate this point is in Hegel's discussion of *Becoming* in his major writings on logic. Though this happens rather early in his logical system, and thus is only a relatively naïve and abstract concept, it offers an accessible illustration of Hegel's project and how the emphasis on dynamism is central to it.

The *Science of Logic* begins by raising the question of how best to begin the project of making thinking itself the object of systematic study. How, in other words, how ought one begin the project of thinking through the ways and means of thinking as such? Hegel's answer is that it must begin with no presuppositions; the beginning must in other words be *immediate*, in the sense that it cannot contain parts that relate to each other, since any such relation (cause/effect, substance/ground, object/property, etc.) would necessarily be exactly the sort of presupposition that would place us several steps into an already underway progress of thought, and not a beginning. Thus "*immediacy* itself" becomes the starting point, understood as "*pure being*," or "being" completely bereft of any determinations whatsoever (1976, 70), "for determination requires both one and another; but at the beginning we have as yet no other" (1991b, ¶86A1). However, in making this abstract, pure, immediate being the starting point, one finds oneself contemplating something which cannot, if it would "be held fast in its purity," contain "any determination or content which could be distinguished in it or by it which it could be distinguished from another" (1976, 82). In other words, *nothing* can really be thought about it or attributed to it without losing one's grip on its purity and indeterminacy, and in this regard, it is indistinguishable from what is typically thought to be its opposite: nothing. Likewise, nothing, as the "immediate [term] that is equal to itself," is indistinguishable from pure being (1991b, ¶88; cf. 1976, 82). Given this revelation that being and nothing are the same, Hegel concludes that each "*vanishes in its opposite*," and thus the truth is not in either one of them independently but rather lies in "this *movement* [emphasis mine] of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*" (1976, 83).

Becoming therefore emerges for Hegel out of the unity of being and nothing, not as a stable and static (quiescent) *third*, but rather itself a dynamic movement between and through being and nothing. As he puts the point in the *Encyclopaedia*:

As their unity, *becoming* is the true expression of the result of being and nothing; it is not just the *unity* of being and nothing, but is inward *unrest* – a unity which in its self-relation is not simply motionless, but which, in virtue of the diversity of being and nothing which it contains, is inwardly turned against itself. (1991b, ¶88R)

That is, what we find here is that the unity realized in becoming is not the amalgamation of discrete and stable elements but rather the realization that

the parts, so to speak, are themselves in *motion*, the articulation of being rushing headlong into nothing, and vice versa. Becoming is thus not something over and above being and nothing but is the dynamic process whereby each of these elements *becomes* the other. It is more than the sum of its parts, and in this way it is their unity, but it is neither a unity within a neutral substrate (1976, 84), nor is it a unity over and against their distinctness. As he makes the point in the *Science of Logic*, the unity of being and nothing “consists rather in this movement, that pure being is immediate and simple, and for that very reason is equally pure nothing, that there *is* a difference between them, but a difference which no less sublates itself and is *not*” (1976, 92). We find in his opening discussion of pure being the thematic moves that characterize his entire system: the positing of an abstract and stable “picture” of the understanding (pure being), the articulation of which leads inexorably toward contradiction (nothing), which transition and movement reveals the underlying truth of the original posit. Being, we find, can only be *misunderstood* when we attempt to pin down and fix it and reveals itself quickly to be dynamic (*living*) in ways that undermine all such efforts.

I have offered this brief recapitulation of this portion of Hegel’s logic to illustrate the idea that, when he tells us “everything is inherently contradictory,” he is drawing our attention to his fundamentally dynamic ontology. This is deeper than simply saying that fixed and stable entities are moving through a determinate space/time field. Hegel’s claim is that the “entities” in question are themselves changing, developing, and *in motion* constitutively. As such, they defy any effort to offer an exhaustive account of their “determinations.” Furthermore, because their being is also a matter of their relationship to other entities, the either/or thinking of the understanding is further thwarted. Contradiction, ambiguity, and change become the order of the day. Being both is and is not nothing. A limit or border, because it always demarcates some *beyond*, is both a limit and an opening.<sup>12</sup> One’s identity is as much a matter of what one is not as what one is, and because one is always developing and changing, one is always something more than what one *is* at any given time. There is much of interest to explore here regarding the extent to which Hegel’s ontological implications are or may be borne out by empirical investigation. Robert Bruce Ware has taken up this question in relation to quantum mechanics (Ware 1999, 33–80), and I would argue that this aspect of Hegel’s work is compatible with the theory of “Agential Realism” being advanced by theoretical physicist Karen Barad (2007). Such questions are beyond the purview of this essay, however. Fortunately, my goal here is slightly more modest—I aim only to show that Hegel’s logic can be characterized as *creolizing*.

The groundwork for this argument has been laid out on the proverbial table, and the task now is only to assemble it. To begin, the understanding

(*Verstand*), as Hegel describes it, is perfectly consistent with, and even illustrative of, *the politics of purity*. Specifically, Hegel characterizes the understanding as a kind of “pictorial” thinking that treats concepts and ideas as static, “dead” substances susceptible to exclusive, all-or-nothing, either/or categorizations. It seeks to impose a kind of order on a living, moving, changing world by attempting to isolate discrete elements, and in order to accomplish this, it must draw clear and impermeable boundaries around them, such that a given attribute or property can be described in an all-or-nothing, either/or fashion. In order to *understand* a concept or object, one must be able to offer an exhaustive account of all and only true propositions (understood exactly in the sense of correspondence that Hegel critiques) about that concept or object, and especially as regards those propositions that distinguish that concept or object from all others. The entire project of Hegel’s logic is to reveal the limitations of this approach, which Hegel describes as leading to misunderstanding and mischaracterization precisely because it attempts to arrest and isolate a dynamic and complex system. It is driven, Hegel suggests, by a naïve desire to *oversimplify* this ambiguous and dynamic process. The act of isolation and ossification that this requires, as I have discussed above, treats what is a living *process* as if it were dead *substance*. Further, Hegel adds that all of this is indicative of a kind of immaturity on the part of the thinker who clings to the understanding (1991b, ¶80A). The insistence on *purity*, on discrete, stable, all-or-nothing, either/or categories, in other words, is for children (and, I might add, politicians), but *adults* must come to grips with ambiguity, change, and contradiction, which, for Hegel, requires the use of speculative reason (*Vernunft*).

Creolizing theory, as I have described it, treats its objects of study as ambiguous and dynamic processes that actively resist being approached as discrete, pure, and static. As a theoretical practice, creolizing emphasizes dynamism and ambiguity, recognizing that genuine comprehension of a living and dynamic world requires that one cannot come from a politics of purity (from the understanding). Not only must the thinker recognize that her objects of study are themselves ambiguous, dynamic, and constitutively in relation to other objects of study (i.e., they are not discrete or pure), but she must account for the way in which all of these related parts are themselves a dynamic and ambiguous whole of which, significantly, the thinker is herself an integral part. Likewise, Hegel describes speculative reason as a very similar process. Reason begins with the naïve distinctions and categories of the understanding, comes to grasp the *movement* of the parts (which parts are not entirely discrete or self-contained), and is driven on from contradiction to contradiction (through the process of *negation*)<sup>13</sup> in an infinite process of ever richer moments of rationality. Reason is not, therefore, the *result* of some process, as Hegel makes clear, but is made manifest only in and through the movement

generated by our encounter with contradiction, such that, if all contradiction were to somehow be resolved, reason would cease to be. Speculative reason, therefore, must continually seek out complexity and contradiction not to resolve it or explain it away but rather to realize the truths that are expressed therein, such that each such realization leads to ever deeper and richer manifestations of reason.

This is another important aspect of why creolization cannot be properly conceived as arriving at some *maximally creolized* end point or goal, even as an asymptotically approached regulatory ideal. I do not want to give the impression that the aim in the theorization of creolization and the creolization of theory is the elision or disavowal of difference. Creolizing complicates, blurs, and disrupts borders and boundaries, but it doesn't eliminate them altogether. Rather, it alters our conception of the fundamental ontology of such borders and boundaries, seeing them as dynamic *practices* rather than static substances. Yes, creolization eschews either/or thinking that insists that one simply is or is not on one side or the other of some static boundary, but to hold that this entails a dismissal of the very ideas of difference and identity is a grave error.

Hegel's metaphor of "picture thinking" is helpful here, insofar as a visual paradigm tends to reinforce this understanding of boundaries as static and fixed, as in a still image. If we shift to a sonic metaphor here, new possibilities emerge for thinking through the notion of a boundary or border appropriate to creolization. Sound, significantly, is possible only in and through *movement*.<sup>14</sup> Waves move through different media, and while they may be more or less *stable*, to fix them in place would be to end them altogether. Borders can thus be importantly real—being Mexican or *Estadounidense*, for example, picks out a real and often highly significant mode of difference in the context of North America. This is a result, however, not of a fixed and binary boundary that neatly and unambiguously divides one from the other but rather of the relative *stability* (in the manner of a standing wave) in the ongoing articulation and contestation (activity) of the differences (and similarities) between the two. Identity, in other words, does not require purity, and creolization does not eliminate difference.

At this point, we can see the crucial affinity between speculative reason and the creolization of theory. The similarities in what they *reject* are readily apparent, and do not need further restatement at this point. It is not merely redundant, but actually misleading, to say that they are simply  $\sim$ (Purity) or  $\sim$ (Understanding). What should be immediately clear in this formulation is that this would be to recapitulate the binary either/or that both claim to eschew, and this points to the first positive similarity. Hegel's account of reason explicitly offers the view that Reason, as the "unity" of constitutive elements (*Being and Essence*), cannot treat that unity as a fully realized and

static *fait accompli*. The unity is not the static unity of a substance but rather the dynamic unity that is manifest only in and through a *process* in motion. Likewise, creolizing theory must not aim at a kind of mixture of elements such that there is some static *result* (the Creole) which takes the place of a new (pure) element in a further mixture but rather happens only in and through the simultaneous *revelation* of the mythic nature of purity and the ongoing *bringing together* in new ways of the various elements. This latter point brings us to another important aspect of Hegel's account of reason: to claim that the truth of a given moment of speculation lies in the dynamic relation of diverse elements means that in some significant way, those diverse elements must be preserved *in their* diversity throughout this process, lest the very possibility of the relation *as a relation* become impossible. Unity, as Hegel points out repeatedly, is only possible in and through diversity, and identity requires difference (and vice versa). This fundamental idea (indeed, the *Idee*), that Reason *is* only by way of processes of unification in and through diversity, can be thought of as just another way of describing *creolization*. In this way, we see that Hegelian speculative reason is a practice of creolization, and thus, *what is rational is creolizing*.

## BRIEF SKETCH OF THE WORK AS A WHOLE

The essays collected here are meant to be manifestations of the practice of creolizing Hegel and illustrations of Hegel's thought as itself creolizing. In different ways, and through diverse topics, the individual contributions help to build a case for the vivacity of Hegel's thought and the fruitfulness of bringing that thought out of the protective silos of disciplinary norms and into productive contact beyond those constraining limitations. I hope to have shown in this introduction that this process is not only intellectually stimulating and productive in its own right but actually is itself a deeply *Hegelian* move, even if it is one that Hegel himself did not always make.

In my original request to potential contributors, I offered only a relatively brief account of the basic concept behind the proposed volume. There was significant room, in other words, for the individual contributors to interpret what it meant to "creolize Hegel" in different ways. I took this approach precisely because I sought to avoid dictating a particular interpretation. I wanted to allow the contributors to more freely offer their own take on the concept, and in that way help to more directly impact its eventual shape. In other words, I wanted to take as a starting point an ambiguous and dynamic boundary between what is and what is not *creolizing*.

The resulting contributions exceeded my expectations. Some of them fall squarely within what one might think of as paradigmatic of the concept of

creolizing, such as placing Hegel in conversation with C.L.R. James or bell hooks, while others take more oblique approaches that may challenge one's ideas about what is or is not creolizing. It is also the case that, given the limits on space and the availability of different potential contributors, there are clear lacunae in the topics, figures, and traditions covered. Asia and Asian thought, for example, is conspicuous by its absence, and I recognize from the outset that this is one among many shortcomings that I was not able to avoid in bringing this volume together. Of course, it should be clear that the possible avenues for creolizing Hegel are myriad, and this first effort will inevitably leave gaps that will strike readers (as they have struck me) as glaring. In the end, I envision this volume as the launching pad for what I hope will be an ongoing conversation about the concept of creolizing, about Hegel, and about the creolizing of Hegel. I thus leave it to the reader to judge the success of each chapter as a manifestation of creolizing, and trust that its shortcomings in scope will be encountered as invitations to take up the project of filling in those gaps. I hope and trust that this text serves as the launching pad for a community of thinkers who will take the project in new directions.

I have organized the text thematically into three parts, though many of the essays could be "at home" in more than one of the themes. In part one, the contributors engage in various ways with reason and dialectic. What binds them together most closely is a shared concern to offer an account of reason that takes seriously critiques of hegemonic or colonial forms of universality without collapsing into a vacuous and naïve relativism. In various contexts and drawing on quite different source materials (both inside and outside of Hegel's corpus), the authors grapple with the effort to think about the nature of thought in a world that is not only pluralistic but also shaped by profound inequality and injustice (both material and epistemic/spiritual).

Part two brings together contributions that engage with questions of history (especially the idea of *universal* history) and aesthetics. The theme that binds these apparently disparate elements together is their common struggle with the question of coherence and narrative. Is there a shared *story* of the history of humanity? Is there *conceptual content* even in instrumental music? In very different ways and drawing from very different traditions, all of the chapters in part two deal with the human effort to make meaning out of historic and aesthetic events.

Finally, part three brings together chapters taking up different aspects of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]. Questions of identity, oppression, and law are brought to the foreground by the authors of these chapters. The variety among them is, again, striking, but what they demonstrate quite compellingly is the potential for Hegelian thought to offer powerful resources for understanding and intervening in oppression and injustice. Often, as these chapters make clear, these are not interventions that Hegel himself might have made



or endorsed, but this is the potential of *creolizing* thought. The Hegel that emerges, in creolizing forms, from these different chapters is, quite often, better adapted to contemporary problems and challenges than a *pure* reading could hope to be. Yet, I believe it is also clear in each of these chapters that this better adapted form is still recognizably *Hegelian* in profound ways.

Taken all together, the chapters in this volume engage with the implications of taking seriously what I referred to above as the fundamental *dynamism* that is the hallmark of Hegelian thought. Reason, history, law, art, and politics are all treated here not as fixed, static, and *pure* subjects, but as processes undergoing a constant development that both conditions and is conditioned by the efforts of human beings to understand them (and this will necessarily entail the role that those human efforts play in *shaping* and being shaped by that very activity of striving to understand). In other words, these chapters demonstrate the importance of treating the objects of study as *living* in the sense described above. In this way, the chapters are also a practice of *freedom*. If freedom is a kind of being at *home* with oneself in one's other (Hegel 1991b, ¶23, ¶24A2), then it must be in part this very *living* process of finding oneself in what at first appears utterly foreign. The crucial insight of creolization, as demonstrated by these chapters, is that this freedom cannot emerge through the absorption, assimilation, or unification with the other, but must preserve, in an ongoing and *living* way, the relations of difference that make the effort to be "at home" possible in the first place.

## NOTES

1. The allusion to Hegel's famous *doppelsatz* from the *Philosophy of Right* is quite intentional here (1991a, 20). I avoid saying that creolization is always rational because the history of processes of creolization, which would certainly include the history of the enslaved and colonized peoples of the "new world," provides compelling reasons to resist making a sweeping claim about such violent and destructive processes. As Glissant points out, creolization is sometimes born out of "hate and wars" and leads more to destruction and decadence than creativity and vitality (1995, 89).

2. For a recent discussion of this aspect of *mestizaje*, see Suárez-Krabbe (2016, 13–18).

3. Though, it should be noted, it is often the case that the removal of paradigmatically external impediments to action can be quite significant aspects of liberatory movements. My point here is against the *reduction* of liberation to the removal of barriers, not to claim that such barriers are utterly irrelevant.

4. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of creolization and the politics of purity, see Monahan (2011, 102–4, 189–99).

5. The term "non-Western" is highly problematic, and I do not wish to ignore that. "The West" is not itself a pure concept, and dividing the world into "the West"

and “the non-West” quite clearly endorses, if only tacitly, the normative hegemony of the West. Likewise, while the use of terms like “global North/South” alters the cartographic orientation, they preserve the same dilemma, insofar as they correspond in practice more or less to West and East. Unfortunately, I have yet to find an unproblematic term that captures this content. It would be most assuredly a positive development if “the West” no longer enjoyed that normative hegemony, but so long as this situation endures, the division between the West and the non-West is meaningful, and it is in this spirit that I deploy the term.

6. See Serequeberhan (2002) for a particularly clear discussion of these inter-related phenomena with respect to African philosophy.

7. The sense of disavowal to which I am appealing here owes much to the work of Sibylle Fischer (2004).

8. Indeed, if the canon is *necessarily* “pure” in this sense, then to creolize the canon would be to abolish it. It is also certainly the case that successful efforts to creolize the canon will inevitably unsettle our understanding of what is or is not “canonical,” and what we even mean by deploying the term. Nevertheless, my point here is that simply turning our backs on canonical figures and texts would be to engage in a project of purification every bit as robust as the one that established the mythologized canon in the first place.

9. I would stress, as well, that thinkers have been engaging in “creolizing” approaches to their theorization all along. Indeed, many of the most influential figures in the canon were themselves indifferent to standards of disciplinary or methodological purity. Nietzsche is one historical example, and cognitive scientists (at least some of them, some of the time) might serve as a contemporary example.

10. The resonance between the understanding and my brief sketch of the “politics of purity” above should be apparent, and I shall return to them presently.

11. The translators adopt this unorthodox spelling of the English word “object” to translate the German word “*Gegenstand*” in a manner that distinguishes it from “*Objekt*,” which they rendered as “object” with the standard spelling in their translation.

12. Edward Casey productively explores this phenomenon in relation not only to conceptual borders but also to *la frontera*—the border between the United States and Mexico (Casey 2014).

13. For a concise discussion of the role of negation in Hegelian dialectic, see Pinkard (1988, 31–34) and Beiser (2005, 167–69).

14. As it happens, vision works more like sound that is typically acknowledged by those employing the visual metaphor. I turn to sound here in part because it is more *obvious* in its inherent dynamism, not because it is uniquely dynamic.

*Part I*

**REASON, LOGIC, AND DIALECTIC**



## Chapter One

# Boundary, Ambivalence, *Jaibería*, or, How to Appropriately Hegel

Rocío Zambrana

Growing up in Puerto Rico, the term *jaibería* had negative connotations. *Jaibería* derives from *jaiba*, a mountain crab that, in moving forward, moves sideways (Georas, Grosfoguel, and Negrón-Muntaner 1997, 30). The term is used to refer to an opportunist. A *jaiba* is an individual who looks for the easy way out, for the alternative with the least resistance (Morales 2012). They seek comfort and employ duplicity in order to achieve it. I never paid much attention to the term until I became politically conscious. In a political context, *jaibería* is often used to describe Puerto Rico's political predicament. The *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA) instituted in 1952 sought to offer "the best of both worlds."<sup>1</sup> It affirmed Puerto Rican cultural nationalism and American economic prosperity by sacrificing the constitution of a sovereign nation-state. *Jaibería* indicates a Puerto Rican political idiosyncrasy, then. Unwilling to integrate to the United States or to become an independent nation-state, Puerto Ricans sought to take advantage of the material and social goods offered by a neocolonial relation—the ELA.

Recently, however, theorists from the island as well as from the diaspora have resignified *jaibería*, dramatically shifting its political meaning and valence. Frances Negrón-Muntoner, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Chloé Georas, for example, have argued that *jaibería* is a "collective practice" of "complicitous critique" or "subversive complicity" (Georas, Grosfoguel, and Negrón-Muntaner 1997, 29). Rather than expressing colonial "docility," *jaiba* politics is a response to the historically specific relations that constrain political agency for Puerto Ricans in the island and in the diaspora.<sup>2</sup> *Jaibería* is a response to the strictures of a "double coloniality of power" in Puerto Rico—a neocolonial relation between the United States and Puerto Rico, and the ongoing forms of coloniality that reproduce race, gender, and class hierarchies established in the island throughout a colonial history. Rather than

expressing the corruption (indeed, aberration) of Puerto Rican identity, then, *jaiberia* is an attempt to work within Puerto Rico's ambivalent relation to an ongoing colonial history. It is a form of political pragmatism, although it is neither utilitarian nor opportunistic. *Jaiberia* is radical, since it is a way of subverting coloniality from within.<sup>3</sup>

A logic of ambivalence and the claim that ambivalence constrains—both restricts and makes possible—political agency at the core of Puerto Rican coloniality guides my reading of Hegel. Indeed, what follows appropriates Hegel in light of the logic of ambivalence distinctive of Puerto Rican coloniality. I characterize my practice of reading Hegel as an “appropriation” for important reasons. I neither seek to decolonize Hegel by opening his texts up to an analysis of a case of coloniality in the Caribbean. Nor do I intend to argue that we should go back to Hegel if we want to understand coloniality in Puerto Rico. I do not pursue an “application” in either direction. Whether implicitly or explicitly, applications resist contamination. They resist a dialectical understanding of concept and case, whereby each fundamentally modifies the other in their encounter. I thus seek to appropriate Hegelian negativity (*Negativität*) by developing negativity as a logic of ambivalence. As elsewhere, I turn to the *Science of Logic* because I believe that Hegel's theory of intelligibility is much more available to appropriation than his philosophy of history or his social and political philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The latter cannot be appropriated without assessing the logic of Hegelian negativity. Their Eurocentrism cannot be dispelled without understanding the force of Hegelian negativity, which has the power to undo the content of Hegel's own discussions of world history, race, women, the state, and so on.

I begin by elaborating the claims that a logic of ambivalence is at the core of Puerto Rican coloniality, and that ambivalence constrains—restricts and makes possible—political agency within the Puerto Rican context. Rather than summarizing the twists and turns of Puerto Rico's colonial history, I situate my analysis in the context of the current debt crisis. I then turn to the *Logic* and assess Hegel's notions of *Grenze* (boundary) and *Schranke* (constraint). Moving from a Doctrine of Being to a Doctrine of Essence and finally arriving at a Doctrine the Concept, I show that Hegel's discussion of boundary and constraint is a critique of understanding identity in light of a logic of infinite deferral. Deferral is problematic, since it represents a refusal to thinking identity on the basis of *actuality* (*Wirklichkeit*). It shifts attention away from the material conditions that constitute any thing or identity, and from the mediating character of those conditions. Actuality constrains how we think of any given identity and calls for an understanding of identity as ambivalent.

## DOUBLE COLONIALITY, DECOLONIAL STRATEGIES

On June 29, 2015, the governor of Puerto Rico, Alejandro García Padilla, announced that Puerto Rico's debt is "not payable" (Corkery and Walsh 2015). The island has "piled on" more public debt per capita—72.6 billion dollars—than any state in the United States. Unemployment hovers around 13% in the island. Forty-five percent of the population lives below the federal poverty line. Between 2011 and 2013, Puerto Rico's population decreased by fifty thousand people annually. Because Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States, it can neither file for bankruptcy nor seek the assistance of the International Monetary Fund in restructuring its debt.<sup>5</sup> Many have suggested that Puerto Rico is "America's Greece" (Rosenfeld 2015). In his announcement, García Padilla stressed that the fact that there is "no other option" but defaulting on payments "is not politics." It is simply "math." Despite García Padilla's assessment, the current debt crisis is a moment of political clarity. It has shifted the debate concerning the political status of the island. From a debate that interrogates the intersection between cultural and political nationalism, it is now a debate tackling ongoing forms of coloniality. Indeed, assessment of Puerto Rico's political predicament has become a reckoning with multiple dimensions of the coloniality of power in Puerto Rico.

Aníbal Quijano articulated the concept of "coloniality of power" in order to call attention to forms of domination distinctive of a postcolonial context. The concept, however, calls into question the idea that we can speak of a colonial legacy, given that colonialism, as a form of exercising political power, was dismantled in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Quijano 2000, 171). In contrast to postcolonial thinkers, Quijano argues that coloniality is a "constitutive element" of a global capitalist "pattern" (*patrón*) (Quijano 2000, 1). Coloniality refers to the institution, reproduction, and maintenance of a global racial/ethnic system of classification. As a system of classification, coloniality organizes all areas and dimensions of existence into hierarchical relations. It organizes work and its products, nature and its resources (including sex and reproduction), subjectivity and knowledge, and authority and its instruments. It institutes a hierarchy of colonizer and colonized that organizes a global system of exploitation, a Eurocentric perspective, and institutions of collective authority that exclude "inferior" populations (Quijano 2000). While the modern, capitalist global pattern emerged in the sixteenth century with the European conquest of the Americas, Quijano's point is that it is an ongoing mode of colonial articulation.

The coloniality of power, then, is a mode of articulating existence based on a racial/ethnic hierarchy that exceeds political exercises of power, exercises of power from nation-states. Decolonization does not necessarily



dismantle forms of coloniality. The difference between the notions of “neocolonialism” or “internal colonialism” and the coloniality of power help explain why. While the former maintain a view of coloniality tied to an “effective rupture” with classical colonialism and seek to track and criticize a “renovated dynamic” (“neo” or “internal”) of colonial domination, the coloniality of power sees a continuity in forms of domination that organize existence in the so-called modern world (Grupo de Estudios Sobre Colonialidad 2016). This is not to discount the significance of political power, but to dispel the idea that decoloniality can be reduced to a matter the sovereignty of states. In addition to resisting formal institutions that organize authority and its instruments, it calls for resistance to the coloniality of subjectivity and knowledge, labor and reproduction, indeed of all areas of existence, which might be in tension with the aims of a nation-state born from an official process of decolonization.

The case of Puerto Rico is a case of “double coloniality of power,” Negrón-Muntoner, Grosfoguel, and Georas suggest in their introduction to *Puerto Rican Jam*. To speak of a double coloniality in Puerto Rico is to note two intersecting systems of hierarchical classification. Race, gender, and class hierarchies are instituted, reproduced, and maintained by the metropolis as well as by local elites.<sup>6</sup> The double coloniality of power, then, refers to the forms of coloniality distinctive of the neocolonial relation between the United States and Puerto Rico established with the ELA, *and* power structures established under both Spanish and American colonial rule and maintained by the island’s elites. While the former subjects all Puerto Rican economic, legal, and political matters to the unilateral power of the US Congress, the latter subjects “Afro Puerto Ricans and mullatoes” to “racist, classist, gendered power structures” in place before the invasion of the United States in 1898 and transformed by both the US invasion and the establishment of the ELA (Georas, Grosfoguel, and Negrón-Muntoner 1997, 14). They are both grounded in race, gender, and class hierarchies, but their exercise of power, that is to say, the way that they organize existence, cannot be reduced to one or the other. Indeed, these two modes of classification intersect in complicated ways.

Perhaps the clearest example of the complexity at hand is the way in which this double coloniality constrains—restricts *and* makes possible—practices of critical resistance. For example, in the early twentieth century, nationalist ideology sought to resist the colonial relation with the United States, while at the same time consolidating forms of coloniality sustained by local elites. Peasantry and the working-class indeed often sought democratic guarantees from the new metropolis in the face of the racial and economic hierarchy maintained by white sugar-growing landowners and coffee-growing *hacendados* (Grosfoguel 2003, 54). Consider also how, in the early twentieth century, feminist suffragists sought an alliance with American suffragists that in effect

called for further colonial intervention in local matters (Georas, Grosfoguel, and Negrón-Muntoner 1997, 6). Their struggle for equal rights deepened the tension between nationalists and colonialists in the island. Puerto Rico's double coloniality, then, not only refers to the complicated ways in which the race, gender, and class hierarchies imposed by the metropolis intersect with local hierarchies. It also refers to the complex ways in which the intersection between local discourses and discourses from the metropolis inflect practices of resistance. These examples suggest that neither one critical category nor a political solution can unequivocally serve the end of decoloniality. This insight is crucial, I will suggest, for thinking through the critical valence of practices of resistance within the current crisis.

A decolonial analysis of the case of Puerto Rico suggests an understanding of double coloniality as following a logic of ambivalence. With the term "ambivalence," I want to point out the coextensive positive and negative meaning and effects of the coloniality of power, in Puerto Rico's case, the double coloniality of power. It is important to distinguish between a logic of ambivalence and a logic of ambiguity, however. In her introduction to the edited volume, *None of the Above*, Negrón-Muntoner argues that Puerto Ricans are "at home with ambiguity" (Negrón-Muntoner 2007, 6ff.). The juridical definition of Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory of the United States functions as a border zone in which Puerto Ricans are "both in and out of the polity" (ibid., 6–7). Rather than colonial subjects, then, Puerto Ricans are constituted as "territorial citizens," "whose citizenship standing and national worth significantly shifts according to location" (ibid., 6; cf. Rivera 2016a and b). Puerto Ricans embrace the uncertainty that follows from the multiple meanings that constitute their political status. In contrast, I argue that the complexities generated by the intersection of the two forms of coloniality of power suggest that the meaning and valence of the political status of Puerto Ricans is contradictory *in the same space* and *at the same time*. Here political status does not refer to territorial citizenship, but rather to the constitution of the meaning and valence of race, class, gender, and other political identities by the intersection of the two forms of coloniality at work in Puerto Rico.

The difference between ambiguity and ambivalence becomes clear when we contrast Negrón-Muntoner's focus on political status in *None of the Above* and a decolonial analysis of the current debt crisis. During the 1998 referendum, 50.3% of the voters elected the "none of the above" (*ninguna de las anteriores*) option on the ballot. Originally, the ballot contained options that were constitutionally acceptable in the eyes of the US Congress: commonwealth (as defined by the United States, therefore affirming territorial status), free association, independence, and statehood. The *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD; the status quo party) objected to the *Partido Nuevo Progresista's* (the statehood party's) gloss of the commonwealth option. The

PPD argued that the commonwealth status should be glossed as a “bilateral pact between two sovereign countries” (Negrón-Muntoner 2007, 2). Although the PPD campaigned for the “none of the above option,” the number of votes indicates an alliance between voters of other political stripes. Ridiculed by many, the option seemed to express the Puerto Rican people’s “legal insanity.” In contrast, Negrón-Muntoner argues that the vote was an important “political performance” (ibid., 4). “In supporting *ninguna de las anteriores*,” she writes, “some Puerto Ricans ... appeared to be actively rejecting ... not only specific status alternatives ... but also the way that the status question itself was posed, the very idea that the US Congress, Constitution, and/or political parties could conceive a single solution to address the complexity of Puerto Rican (trans)locations” (ibid., 6). In fact, she maintains, choosing *ninguna de las anteriores* should be read as rejecting *all of the preceding* alternatives, underscoring the spatial and temporal dimensions of “*anterior*.” It “consigns the options of statehood, independence, and colonialism to the past, and so expresses both doubt and hope in the future” (ibid.).

Similar conclusions can be reached about the 2012 referendum. The referendum was structured by the President’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status, which dictated that Congress would allow the indefinite continuation of the island’s territorial status, but would only recognize one of two non-territorial options—statehood or independence (whether in the form of a free association between sovereign nations or full independence). The ballot thus contained two parts. The first question asked voters to determine whether they were content with the current territorial status. Irrespective of the answer to this question, the second question asked voters to choose between statehood, independence, or free association. Supporters of the status quo strategized again to leave the second question blank, votes that, added to votes for the non-statehood option, would override statehood’s win. Yet 54% of the voters rejected the extension of the territorial status when answering the first part of the ballot. I suggest that the referendum should also be read as a political performance. A rejection of the territorial status combined with a rejection of the terms listed on the second part of the ballot represent a rejection of the thought that an adequate solution is contained in these options.

Negrón-Muntoner’s analysis is insightful. It sheds light on the limits of a political solution in official terms. Indeed, she argues that “*boricua* everyday practice is constituted less by an overwhelming acceptance of colonial imposition than by an impressive capacity to circumvent or re-signify the state and its laws.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, describing the logic of Puerto Rican coloniality in terms of the ambiguity that follows from our territorial condition does not capture the complexity of the intersection between the two forms of coloniality she describes with her coauthors in *Puerto Rican Jam*. Ambiguity does not capture, in other words, the *mediating character* of the intersection of race, class, and gender and official political interests in the island *and* with the metropolis.

Rather than a logic of spatiotemporal deferral, it is a logic of coextensive positive and negative meanings and effects that follows from an intersecting double coloniality. A decolonial analysis of the current debt crisis helps us see why.

Rafael Bernabé, the 2012 and 2016 candidate for governor for the *Partido del Pueblo Trabajador* (PPT), has given an insightful analysis of the debt crisis and its proposed solutions (see Bernabé 2015a, 2015c). In order to grasp the difficulties as well as imagine the possibilities for renegotiating the island's debt, one must understand the economic structure that has led Puerto Rico to economic decline. Bernabé argues that we should begin by noting that the century of American colonialism should be understood as a century of domination by US corporations. Currently, two-dozen US corporations extract 35 billion dollars a year in profits from their operations in Puerto Rico (Bernabé 2015a). To put this figure in perspective, we should note that the income of the government of Puerto Rico is around 9 billion dollars, and we should recall that the debt is currently at 72.6 billion dollars. Throughout the twentieth century, US corporations have largely dominated the Puerto Rican economy, but since 1947, Bernabé explains, tax exemptions have been the Puerto Rican government's main mechanism to attract US investment in the island. At the moment, US corporations pay around 4% tax (see Mero 2015). The problem here is that the profit generated is not reinvested in the island, allowing only economic stagnation and indeed decline.

Bernabé argues that this history of domination by US corporations should frame how Puerto Ricans address the debt. His October 2015 discussion of three main proposals debated in the island remains insightful, even when, as we will see, conditions have since changed. These proposals help evaluate not only who stands to gain from any measure but also which alternative actually represents a subversive rather than colonial measure. First, bondholders demand that the debt be paid and have suggested austerity measures to fund repayment. These measures include raising taxes, cutting health care, firing teachers, cutting pensions, selling over 4 million dollars worth of government buildings, privatizing public ports, closing neighborhood schools, and cutting support to the University of Puerto Rico (see Senator Warren 2015). Second, the Puerto Rican government (led by the PPD) has argued that the debt needs to be restructured but has agreed to pursue austerity measures such as privatizing electricity, restructuring government agencies as public/private institutions, and rewriting labor laws as part of a repayment plan.

Third, the labor movement, different social movements (e.g., the student and the ecological movement), and the PPT have also argued in favor of renegotiating the debt, yet on radically different terms. Rather than pursuing austerity measures, they suggest reconsidering tax exemption laws. The Puerto Rican government should tax corporations in order to reinvest profits generated in the island, thereby bolstering local economic growth. Additionally and crucially, these social movements have insisted that the debt be audited

(see Bauzá 2016). In order to assess the interests at play when renegotiating the debt, the debt must be audited. Although there is still some confusion about who exactly owns the debt, it is clear that most of the debt is owned by hedge funds and, increasingly, vulture funds (see Warren 2015; see also Arbasetti and Minet 2015 and Arbasetti 2015). An audit report released in June 2016 has revealed that some of the debt may have been issued illegally, since “politicians exceeded constitutional debt limits and their own authority” (Mckenna 2016; see also Gottiniaux 2016).

While the first and second solutions are not only “chaotic” but also “subordinating,” Bernabé argued in October 2015 that the third is “enabling” (Bernabé 2015a). “Whether under Chapter 9, Puerto Rican bankruptcy or a direct negotiation,” Bernabé concludes, “we have to confront renegotiating the debt as it is: a battle. Rather than hurting them, a responsible government would mobilize workers to claim what the country needs, before the bondholders, judges, and congressmen” (Bernabé 2015b). For Bernabé, crucial to fighting this battle aright are alliances between individuals and parties that vastly disagree on the status question. Crucial as well are alliances with the labor movement and other social movements in the United States, movements that are invested in economic equality and that will help make the case at the federal level. Bernabé has also defended the view that the Puerto Rican government should pursue a strategy of “disobedience,” refusing to pay for an illegal debt, placing pensions, public services, and economic growth first (see Bauzá 2016). The crisis has already been called a “humanitarian crisis,” with at least 150 schools shut down and hospitals operating without electricity.<sup>8</sup> For Bernabé, then, the third option is enabling, since it puts people before the debt—“*la gente antes que la deuda*.”

On June 30, 2016, President Barack Obama signed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) into law. PROMESA established a fiscal control board (“Junta de Control Fiscal”) appointed by the president and comprising seven members who would not be accountable to the local government, yet would have complete control over the local budget, laws, financial plans, and regulations.<sup>9</sup> The board, “*la Junta*,” would have the power to force the local government to balance its budget and, moreover, restructure its debt with bondholders and other creditors. Among other controversial features, it allows for the federal minimum wage to be lowered to \$4.25 an hour and bypasses the US Department of Labor’s overtime regulation. In both the island and the United States, *la Junta* has been characterized as an explicitly colonial maneuver, setting the island back to US control before the 1952 constitution. PROMESA, then, has unmasked the ELA as a colonial formula.

The House’s vote in favor of the bill on June 9, 2016, coincided with the Supreme Court’s decision on *Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Valle*, a double-jeopardy

case that required that the Court clarify Puerto Rico's sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> The Court determined that Puerto Rico was not sovereign enough to prosecute those who have been prosecuted by federal government, notwithstanding the 1952 constitution and the then US declaration that it "vest[s] in the people of Puerto Rico" complete "authority and responsibility for local self-government" (Stern 2016).<sup>11</sup> The Court's ruling, then, also put on display the colonial character of the ELA. Although Puerto Rico was taken off the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories in 1953, in June 2016 the Special Committee on Decolonization passed a resolution to take up the case of Puerto Rico once more. Debate about the political status of Puerto Rico has thus gained new significance. In fact, the PPD, the "commonwealth" party, has recently argued that if they remain in power as the result of November 2016 elections they would support a 2017 referendum that would solely ask whether or not citizens are in favor of statehood. The independence party, in contrast, regains traction by arguing that ceasing relations with the United States would be tantamount to recovering relations with the world, providing economic opportunities that have been foreclosed by the ELA (see Jiménez 2016).

These recent events have exposed not only that the ELA is defunct but also that it has always been false. As a practice of subversive resistance, then, a *jaiba* politics cannot work within the ELA. Yet, given the strictures of the current crisis, a solution to the status question will not further decoloniality if it lacks efforts to dismantle the hierarchies that comprise a double coloniality in Puerto Rico. Precisely in light of the current crisis, practices of resistance must be far reaching, aware that a solution to the status question *on its own* will not address forms of oppression that thrive on the race, gender, and class hierarchies that comprise the legacy of a long colonial history. The double coloniality of power ought to be addressed, one might argue, as a complex situation first and foremost mediated by the interests of US corporations. This would require tracking the role that neoliberal interests play in any political solution. But it would do so by tracking how that role is made possible by *and* furthers the intersection of forms of coloniality exercised by the metropolis and by elites in the island. A decolonial strategy, then, would address shifting economic and political interests that organize existence through the intersecting race, gender, and class hierarchies that comprise our ongoing colonial legacy.

This, in turn, requires reckoning with the coextensive positive and negative meanings and effects that follow from any practice of resistance from within such a complex site. It is important to underscore that the decolonial strategies Bernabé proposes are neither anchored in a nationalist discourse nor affirm a form of political pragmatism that individualizes responses to the crisis. As Carlos Pabón recently notes, the latter would entail a win for neoliberalism (see Pabón 2015). Specific communities within the island struggle *with and from* the coextensive meanings and effects generated by these shifting intersections



in order to address concrete issues. Resistance to the recently passed education reform (Project 1456), for example, has called into question the austerity measures dismantling the public education system and significantly impacting labor rights for teachers in the island (see Alvarado 2015 and Heilig 2015). Critical resistance raises awareness of the role that the debt crisis plays in the reform, namely, that the project is a mechanism for addressing debt on neoliberal terms. But it also seeks alliance with resistance movements that have called into question similar reforms in the United States (Alvarado 2015). Here practices of critical resistance are carved out not only in light of the complexity of the matter at hand but also through an ambivalent relation to the metropolis.

It remains to be seen what the meaning and effects of the resistance to the Financial Control Board, *la Junta*, will yield. In order to specify whether such resistance is subversive and indeed a form of decoloniality, however, it will be crucial to track how the convergence of the debt crisis and the sovereignty crisis is articulated and to which ends it is resolved. Currently, resistance to the control board is converging with a variety of struggles, for example, against tax exemption laws 20, 22, and 73, which attempt to reboot Puerto Rico's status as a tax haven; against restructuring the University of Puerto Rico, a public institution, in light of austerity measures; against privatizing common lands, such as beaches and other coastal lands; against the Jones Act and its shipping laws, which inflates the cost of shipping goods, burdening Puerto Ricans who import 85% of products consumed; and against the aerial spraying of Naled, an insecticide aiming to address the Zika virus crisis and against depositing toxic coal ashes in Peñuelas Valley Landfill. Critical practices of resistance from the workers, student, ecological, and other social justice movements are converging by addressing economic, political, and juridical matters beyond the status question. For example, criticism to bill 1621, which seeks to privatize coastal lands of La Parguera, has been called the "legalization of privilege" by and for island elites. Criticism of Naled spraying has been linked to the history of experimentation on Puerto Ricans as well as Puerto Rican soil (see Agencia EFE 2016 and Cancel 2016). As María de Lourdes Santiago, 2016 candidate for governor and senator for the Puerto Rican Independence Party, has stressed, resistance to depositing coal ash waste in Peñuelas highlights the environmental injustice and indeed environmental racism that poor communities face in the island (López Cabán 2016). Criticism here points out the class and race hierarchies at work in each case.

## BOUNDARIES, CONSTRAINTS

Having provided a sketch of double coloniality in Puerto Rico, I now turn to Hegel's discussion of *Grenze* and *Schranke*, of boundary and constraint.



I suggest reading Hegelian negativity as a logic of ambivalence by looking at his treatment of the constitutive function that a boundary and its constraints play for any identity. Above I argued against understanding the logic of Puerto Rican coloniality as ambiguity. The ongoing deferral that follows from the island's territorial status does not capture the double coloniality distinctive of Puerto Rico. In contrast, I argued that the logic of Puerto Rican coloniality is ambivalent. Coextensive meanings and effects follow from the intersection of the forms of coloniality at work in Puerto Rico. Ambivalence is the effect of the *mediating* character of a "totality of conditions," of two intersecting forms of coloniality. Hegel's discussion of boundary and constraint in the *Logic* is a critique of understanding identity in light of infinite deferral, since it would mean that any such identity *is* what it *ought to be*.<sup>12</sup> This is problematic, for Hegel, because it refuses to think identity on the basis of *actuality*, of the totality of conditions that constitute any thing or identity. It shifts attention away from the mediating character of those conditions, which constrain identity in the first place. The stakes of Hegel's critique, then, can be grasped in light of the logic of ambivalence distinctive of the Puerto Rican case.

Hegel's discussion of *Grenze* and *Schranke* in the *Logic* is, in part, a response to Kant's use of these terms in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena*. For both Kant and Hegel, boundaries and constraints are a matter of finitude. Famously, Kant argues that the task of a critical philosophy is to draw the bounds (*Grenze*) of possible experience. Indeed, a critical philosophy is critical, rather than dogmatic, when it reins in reason's natural tendency to transgress the bounds of experience, when it seeks to know what it cannot know, what it can only think (Kant 1999, Axii–xiii, and A3/B6–7). For Kant, the idea of a boundary is tied to the acknowledgment that we can only know appearances and not things in themselves (see Rose 1981, 187–88). Acknowledging the bounds of experience is coeval with acknowledging the limits of knowledge, then. Recognizing the limits of finitude makes possible not only critical metaphysics but also responsible scientific inquiry. Furthermore, acknowledging the finitude of the human standpoint makes possible understanding the strictures of morality and faith, where reason plays an important, albeit regulative, role. Boundaries, then, establish a distinction between what is known and what cannot be known, thereby suggesting the strictures of scientific and moral striving.

In the *Prolegomena*, Kant argues that a boundary always has "something positive" whereas a limit contains "mere negations" (Kant 2004, 105; see Rose 1981, 188ff.). That is, a boundary presupposes a determinable space. A boundary encloses whatever is inside the boundary. Thus, the very notion of a boundary implies a distinction between what is inside and outside, and hence a conception of a beyond of the boundary. Reason transgresses the bounds of experience when it seeks to know what it can only think. A limit,

in contrast, contains mere negations. It is a quantity, an incomplete series. A mathematical series, such as a sequence that proceeds to an infinitely smaller amount, is the model for Kant's understanding of the limit. Reason plays a regulative role when it strives toward scientific knowledge and morality. Within scientific inquiry, reason strives for completion. Within morality, it strives for the highest good. In both cases, the goal is never achieved. The achievement of total knowledge of empirical reality or the coincidence of happiness and virtue can only be striven after, given that empirical reality is inexhaustible and that the coincidence of happiness and virtue would take an infinite amount of time and would require a God to secure their harmony. Scientific inquiry and morality necessarily remain incomplete, then. Finite creatures like us remain striving after their completion.

For Kant, the question becomes "[h]ow does our reason conduct itself in this connection of what we know with what we don't know and never shall?" (Kant 2004, 105). For Hegel, Kant should have realized that he has at once acknowledged *and* denied an actuality that is beyond our apprehension, as Gillian Rose (1981, 188) puts it. The crucial point is that, in having affirmed the power of reason to draw the bounds of experience and to set its own limits, Kant has *affirmed* knowledge of where the boundary is to be drawn. He has thereby transgressed it. For Hegel, it follows that we ought to call into question the distinction between boundary and limit. In the *Logic*, he sets out to show that Kant's notions of boundary and limit are self-undermining. Indeed, he sets out to show that they are inseparable, and that this inseparability calls for a radically revised account of finitude *and* infinity.

Like Kant's, Hegel's discussion of *Grenze* and *Schranke* in the Doctrine of Being are part of an account of finitude.<sup>13</sup> Yet, in contrast to Kant, Hegel is interested in the very concept of finitude—what it presupposes and implies. He is not interested in an account of finite cognition. We must realize, Hegel argues, that "when we say of things that they are finite, we understand . . . that non-being constitutes their nature, their being" (Hegel 2010, 101). The "truth of the finite" is their "*finis*, their end." For Hegel, the finite is always reaching beyond itself—deferring its own demise, defying its own limits. This follows from the boundary that constitutes the finite's identity. Something (*Etwas*) is itself because it has a boundary that distinguishes it from something else. The boundary therefore marks the nonbeing of the other; it marks the other as something in general (ibid., 98ff.). But a boundary functions in the same way for the other. It makes it into something, hence establishes its other as that something in general with which it contrasts. The point is that, given its boundary, something both is and is not. For Hegel, then, a boundary establishes "otherness" as constitutive of "something."

That something is by virtue of what it is not, Hegel argues, means that it is self-transcending. Finite things, he writes, "propel themselves beyond

themselves, beyond their being,” given their constraint (*Schranke*) (ibid., 101). A boundary *constrains* the finite thing. Here, Hegel is attempting to displace Kant’s distinction between a spatial understanding of a boundary and the mathematical understanding of the limit. Hegel clarifies that the notion of a boundary does more than point to the constitutive role that otherness plays in the identity of any thing. A boundary is a relation, as we saw above. It is the relation between something and other. It should not be understood as something discrete—a line, for example. As a relation, it should be understood as the *self-negation* of the thing. A thing is by propelling itself beyond itself, which is to say, by negating itself. It does so by negating its self-standing or purportedly self-sufficient identity.

This movement of self-transcendence—this self-negation—cannot come to a halt. Precisely because the being of the finite is its *finis*, its end is to perpetually defer its own demise, defy its own limits. For this reason, Hegel argues that the constraint has the character of an ought (*das Sollen*) (ibid., 103–4). To say that something is and is not is to establish what it is in relation to what it *should be*. What it is not has been established as essential to it. For Hegel, this movement of infinite deferral establishes that the finite thing is a *non-actuality*. This movement does not represent a recognition of otherness as constitutive of identity. It is, rather, an indeterminate striving that turns away from the concrete, determinate conditions that constitute the thing. The indeterminacy of the striving makes the thing indeterminate, its identity the mere movement of striving. This fails to account for identity because it turns away not only from the concrete conditions that constitute the thing but also from the mediation of a totality of conditions involved in the identity of the thing.

Nevertheless, the discussion in the Doctrine of Being is important, because it helps Hegel establish *self-negation* is constitutive of identity (see Zambrana 2015). Negation is always negation of something—whether a logical category, a philosophical position, or a political institution. Negation, however, yields an alternative determination. It is never mere negativity, sheer destruction, or deferral. It is an exclusion that posits alternative boundaries and hence a relation of something and its now established other. Negation, then, requires content, as we will see in a moment. It is always determinate. Now, negation is not a function of an epistemic or political subject. It is the work of articulation by the conditions that constitute the thing itself. These conditions set boundaries that constrain what the thing is and what it could be, thereby instituting the thing’s identity. Identity involves self-negation, then, because it is the process of articulation. It is a setting of a boundary that involves negotiating the very identity of the thing.

The crucial point is that a logic of boundary fails to properly articulate *mediation*. In the Doctrine of Essence, Hegel begins to account for identity on the basis of mediation by pursuing a critique of what he calls “external

reflection”—any metaphysical position that maintains a dualism between essence and appearance. For Hegel, mediation is a deflection—turning or bending backward—of the thing itself (Hegel 2010, 352). Reflexivity, in other words, is nothing other than the identity of the thing on the basis of existent conditions that produced it in the first place. It is not the work of an epistemic, moral, or political subject. It is the constitution of the thing by determinate conditions.

For Hegel, doing justice to reflexivity beyond a metaphysics of external reflection requires rethinking causality. Hegel does not want to displace causality entirely, however. Rather, he argues that the notions of cause and effect fundamentally depend on each other. The essence of a thing or an identity can only be established after the fact, given that it is constituted by a totality of existent conditions that exceed it. Here Hegel is trying to develop a *retrospective* view of mediation. Cause and effect can only be specified by considering the relation between the thing and its conditions; yet we can only do this after the fact, after the thing is constituted as such-and-such and by such-and-such conditions. We must therefore think of causality in terms of “reciprocity.” The crucial point here is that, for Hegel, mediation must thus be thought of as the activity of existent conditions. Indeed, existent conditions are the basis for establishing essential relations such as causality.

When we say that the identity of the thing derives from some metaphysical, physical, or political principle beyond existent conditions, Hegel argues, we are caught up in a philosophical confusion. Dualism is a conceptual confusion because it misunderstands *negation*. For Hegel, negation is the negation of something determinate. But this way of putting things might lead us to believe that there is a self-standing identity that is negated by—determined by—a metaphysical, physical, or political essence. This gets things backward, according to Hegel. We are confused when we presuppose something that exists and is then negated, rather than realizing that the thing is the product of negation. A correct understanding of identity grasps its retrospective character—that it is the product of a totality of existent conditions, that therefore its “essence” can only be established after the fact, once it has come to be out of existent conditions (ibid., 347). Identity is thus a matter of *actuality*, of existent conditions, rather than possibility, of an infinity of indeterminate relations (ibid., 477ff.).

Hegel’s discussion of actuality is reworked in the Doctrine of the Concept in important ways. Although the critique of external reflection makes possible an account of mediation, it also falls short. It calls into question metaphysical dualism but does not clarify that any given identity is dependent on existent conditions that are *always already mediated*. In failing to account for the mediated character of existent conditions, it still works within the dualism of essence and appearance. Hegel moves on to develop a notion of

form—indeed of rationality—that accounts for this radical conception of mediation. By characterizing mediation within the Doctrine of the Concept as “radical,” I mean to point out that the task of this last volume of the *Logic* is to show that mediation is at the root of things. That is to say, mediation itself is irreducible. For Hegel, this challenges the foundationalism of both the ought structure and external reflection. Showing that mediation is irreducible requires showing that form and content are inseparable. Hegel’s notion of *absolute form* articulates this unity of form and content. Form, for Hegel, is nothing but the negation of immediacy (see Zambrana 2015). It requires content in order to be negation. As we have seen, negation yields an alternative determination. It articulates an alternative content.

The notion of absolute form—that form is nothing but negativity, that content is therefore necessary—responds to the failures of the logic of boundary and the notion of actuality that we have seen. The inseparability of form and content reformulates the notion of existent conditions articulated in the Doctrine of Essence. We must understand the claim that existent conditions constitute any thing as a claim about a *system of relations* that constitute the thing. A totality of conditions that exceed the thing are the very ground of the thing. The crucial point here is that we must speak of a system because existent conditions are related through negation. Hegel makes this very abstract claim a bit more concrete in his discussion of the syllogism (Hegel 2010, 588ff.). Syllogism is not a logical operation, but a way of understanding that any determination is the result of relations of mediation that are themselves mediated. The syllogism, Hegel maintains, captures the reciprocal determination of terms within a system of relations.

As I have argued elsewhere, Hegel’s notion of determinate negation is articulated by the disjunctive syllogism (ibid., 622ff., esp. 624). Relations of mediation are understood as a *system* when we think of relations of *exclusion*. A system of relations—the totality of conditions—must be thought of as a system of relations of exclusion whereby the identity of any thing is established on the basis of what it is not. Such an identity is based on a totality of existent conditions that are themselves mediated by its position within the system of relations. The crucial point here is that, in arguing that the disjunctive syllogism articulates mediation as determinate negation, Hegel is attempting to underscore the fact that inferential patterns comprising relations of negation coextensively institute the totality of relations involved in the inference itself. He is attempting, in other words, to establish the irreducibility of mediation.

As a system of relations of exclusion that mediate always already mediated elements, negativity yields ambivalence, rather than ambiguity. Any given identity is coextensively negative and positive. It is not merely itself by virtue of the other. It is itself by virtue of being itself *and* its other. On my reading,

this means that any given identity admits of both positive and negative determinations, both positive and negative meanings and effects. The crucial point here is that the mediated *and* mediating totality of conditions yields a *complex site of determination*. Actuality is this complex site of intersecting conditions. Any identity is a singularity or individuality because it is the result of such a complex set of conditions and relations. It is grounded in actuality. In order to assess it, to understand how it is determined by those conditions that exceed it *and* how it itself functions as a mediating force, we must understand the complex, overlapping, mutually informing concrete conditions that produced it in the first place. According to Hegel, then, is we want to think what “ought to be” we must begin by comprehending “what is”—actuality. We must grasp the complex site of mediation in its concreteness and respond to its “inner negativity”—to the fact that such complexity lends itself to positive and negative meanings and effects.<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I began this chapter with a reflection on the term *jaibería*. Rather than a term that expresses colonial docility, it is a term that captures the complexity of the Puerto Rican situation and articulates the complexity of any meaningful response. Understood as a strategy of subversive complicity, *jaibería* is a way of understanding the constraints of actuality—in the Hegelian sense described above. It captures the overlapping forms of coloniality that are felt in singular, concrete situations. Critical resistance, accordingly, might begin with the singularity of the crisis in order to begin untangling the system of relations that produce and sustain it in the first place. Critical reflection of the debt crisis, for example, might begin with the ways in which it is felt within the working class and examine how it trades on overlapping race, gender, and class hierarchies old and new. It might seek to address the status question, but in terms of the hierarchies that comprise our ongoing double colonial legacy.

Rather than an insult, then, *jaibería* should be understood as an empowering response to disempowerment. Yet because it trades on the ambivalence of the concrete conditions that constitute any situation in the first place, it admits of both positive (liberatory) and negative (oppressing) meanings and effects. It can be both a force of liberation and at the same time find itself trading in modes of oppression. Hence, its character: it is subversive, yet also a form of complicity. This is not to advance a form of moral or political skepticism but to confront the complexity of the matter at hand, of the thing itself, as Hegel would say. Given these strictures, a decolonial response to the Puerto Rican predicament would entail vigilance so that its complicity always remains *subversive*. Hegel does not help us with our political task, but appropriating

Hegelian negativity as ambivalence might help understand the need for such vigilance.

## NOTES

1. Literally, “Free Associated State.” Puerto Rico became a possession of the United States in 1898, as a result of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American war. In 1900, the Foraker Act established a civilian governing structure, which included a governor appointed by the president of the United States and recognition of Puerto Rican citizenship. In 1917, the Jones Act extended US citizenship to Puerto Ricans. It was not until 1952, however, that a purportedly autonomous government was established under the banner of Estado Libre Asociado. Although the island drafted its own constitution, it remained an unincorporated territory beholden to the power of the US Congress. I discuss the status issue below.

2. See Marqués (1993).

3. See Grosfoguel’s notion of “estadidad radical” (radical statehood) in 2003.

4. In a way, this is what I have been doing all along in my scholarship on Hegel, although I have never thematized my subject position in my engagement with the European tradition. See esp. Zambrana (2015).

5. In 1984, the US Congress amended the bankruptcy code. Without apparent rationale, it added a provision saying that Puerto Rico would count as a state for every purpose except for allowing its municipalities to invoke Chapter 9. See Feldman (2015).

6. In addition to Grosfoguel, Georas, and Negrón-Muntoner, see Espinosa-Miñoso (2014) and Curiel (2016).

7. Here she is referring to Fernando Picó’s insightful chapter in the volume, “The Absent State.”

8. See, e.g., Editorial Board (2016).

9. PROMESA (HR 4900) can be read here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4900>. For an insightful commentary, see Rivera (2016a, 2016b).

10. The opinion and dissent can be read here: [chrome-extension://oemmmndcbl-d-boiebfnladdacbfmadadm/http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/15pdf/15-108\\_k4mp.pdf](chrome-extension://oemmmndcbl-d-boiebfnladdacbfmadadm/http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/15pdf/15-108_k4mp.pdf).

11. These are Harry Truman’s words quoted by Stern (2016).

12. Hegel also speaks of the issue at hand in terms of the contrast between “bad infinity” and “true infinity.”

13. Note that di Giovanni’s translates *Grenze* as “limit” and *Schranke* as “restriction.”

14. In the words of the *Phenomenology*, “the negative belongs to the content itself, and is the positive” (Hegel 2013, 59). Or, in the words of the *Logic*, “the positive aspect is nothing else but the inner negativity of the determinations” (Hegel 2010, 35).





## *Chapter Two*

# **C.L.R. James, Africana Transcendental Philosophy, and the Creolizing of Hegel**

Paget Henry

C.L.R. James was one of the towering figures of the Caribbean philosophical tradition, contributing to its schools of poeticism, historicism, Pan Africanism, and Marxism. James moved between these schools with breathtaking agility, crossing disciplinary boundaries as he created ever more comprehensive but never closed syntheses out of their partial insights. This particular type of intellectual agility was in no small part due to James' familiarity with the transcendental spaces of these schools of thought. In this paper, I will approach James from the perspective of an Afro-Caribbean creole philosopher. That is, as a philosopher who succeeded in weaving original or creole syntheses out of the inherited African, Indian, and European traditions of his native Trinidad and the wider Caribbean. I will also be using the term "creolizing" in the sense of rereading major Western philosophical figures through these creole lenses, as developed by Jane Gordon, Neil Roberts, Drucilla Cornell, and Michael Monahan in their project of "creolizing the canon" (Gordon and Roberts 2015).

In my exposition of James' creolizing of Hegel, I will focus more specifically on his earlier appropriations of Hegel and how they contributed to making more explicit the still largely implicit transcendental dimensions of Caribbean philosophy. By the transcendental dimensions of Caribbean philosophy I am referring to the regional history of the practices of interrupting normal routines of disciplinary thought to examine, repair, or replace the *a priori* or the always already presupposed categoric foundations of the discipline or discourse that one is using. In turning his searchlight on these foundations, the key *a priori* categories and claims that James borrowed from Hegel were the subject/object relationship, the mutual determination of subject and object in any given knowing situation, the necessary dualities that were inherent in different subject/object relationships, and Hegel's claim that

to grasp the full potential of the object of study, it should not be seen only as substance or material object but also as subject.

In the 1940s, James had some *a priori* repair work to do on his discourse of Trotskyism. As we will see, this was his primary reason for appropriating Hegel's dialectical logic of *a priori* categories. The full transcendental significance of these moves by James emerges when they are seen in relation to the *a priori* work done by earlier and later Africana thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Frantz Fanon, Cedric Robinson, Sylvia Wynter, and Lewis Gordon. Following our examination of James' engagement with Hegel's dialectical logic of *a priori* categories, we will turn more directly to his creolization of it in the fourth major synthesis of his intellectual life. This was the synthesis that gave birth to the distinct Jamesian dialectic, one that moved well outside of the *a priori* categories of both the Hegelian and Marxian dialectics. It was also the synthesis that gave birth to his classic, *Beyond a Boundary*.

## FOUNDATIONS OF JAMES' INTEREST IN HEGEL'S DIALECTIC

Because of his treatment of the master/slave relationship in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel is easily one of the major Western philosophers who have been engaged, critiqued, and creolized by Caribbean and Africana thinkers. Fanon's brilliant critique of Hegel in Chapter 7 of *Black Skin, White Masks* or more recently Teshale Tibebu's *Hegel and the Third World* come immediately to mind. These critical engagements have consistently focused on the objectified and naturalized images of Africa and Africans in Hegel's philosophy of history, and how these images contradict the priority of Subject over Substance so brilliantly developed in the *Phenomenology*. Tibebu is particularly sharp on this point, developing in great detail the opposing constructions of this priority in the cases of Hegel's treatment of the formations of the European "I" of self-consciousness and the "We" of collective self-consciousness. He shows that in the treatment of the "We," the movements of collective self-formation do not transcend their empirical determinants—particularly those of race and geography—as they make their way back to the domain of Spirit. On the contrary, they remain trapped in these external determinants and also in internal tendencies toward premature closure. These critiques of Fanon and Tibebu reflect the general thrust of Africana engagements with Hegel.

James' early approach to Hegel is very different and quite surprisingly does not address his treatment of Africa and Africans. At this point, James was not particularly interested in Hegel's ideas on race and Spirit. He was interested

in how the dialectical logic could help him to fix the difficulties he was having with his Trotskyist discourse. Thus, the Hegelian texts to which James paid the closest attention at this time were the *Science of Logic* and “The Lesser Logic” in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. In short, James was on a methodological quest of an *a priori* nature. He was engaging these Hegelian texts in regard to the operations and dialectical movements of the already pre-supposed categories of everyday disciplinary thinking and writing. The results of this sustained interrogation of these works by Hegel are detailed in James’ text, *Notes on Dialectics* (1980).

The specific circumstance that brought James to this intense study of Hegel’s transcendental logic was the ending of the second major dialectical synthesis of his intellectual life, Trotskyism, and the search for a third. Although he had already gone through one such process of self-transformation, James was now very aware that he had not grasped fully the categoric dimensions of these life-changing processes. It was precisely this hidden dimension of these major developmental transitions that James saw Hegel as having mastered. Consequently, it was this transcendental mastery that was the source of James’ interest in Hegel’s dialectic logic of *a priori* categories. It was on account of this mastery that James often referred to Hegel as “the Maestro.”

Before James had become a Trotskyist, he had worked out an original intellectual synthesis while he was in Trinidad. This synthesis was a ludic/literary one that was grounded in the ontology of creative realism and was also the discourse that established his identity as a cricket player, a cricket commentator, and a writer of fiction. This was the early phase of James’ life, which produced some of his finest cricket writing, great short stories, and his path-breaking novel, *Minty Alley*. It was also during this poeticist or ludic/literary phase of his life that James came to see the human subject as inherently creative and, because of the spontaneous nature of this creativity, that human subjectivity could never be fully captured within any closed system of thought. Rather, the life and movements of this creative subjectivity always remained partially outside of the categories and full grasp of such systems, and therefore had the potential to change them. This was the core of the ontology of creative realism that James shared with other Caribbean writers such as Wilson Harris (Henry 2009, 181–83). Here we can begin to see why James would be interested in Hegel’s concept of Subject.

Around the age of thirty, James felt this literary/ludic person he had become going through a major inner change. In spite of his attachments to it, James experienced the slipping away of the loves of his youth—cricket and literature. It was also the passing of the epistemic subject, the *a priori* categories, and the knowing situation that had made possible all of this literary and cricket production. Later, in *Beyond a Boundary*, James

wrote: “fiction-writing drained out of me and was replaced by politics. I became a Marxist, a Trotskyist” (2005, 197). Thus was born James’ new persona, the political theorist and activist. As a different knowing subject, this emerging political theorist brought with him a new subject/object relationship, a new set of *a priori* categories, and new dualities—all different from those of the earlier ludic/literary subject through which James had been able to know and write about the world.

If the epistemic framework of this ludic/literary persona can be described as poeticist, then the *a priori* terrain of the new Trotskyist epistemic subject framed by a different synthesis can be described as sociohistorical poetics. In this new knowledge-producing situation categoric space had to be made for the operations of a historicized political economy. In the course of these adjustments, ludic and literary categories were pushed into the background resulting in the decline of James’ literary and cricket writing and the rise of his political writing. This was the Trotskyist phase that produced such important texts as *World Revolution* and *The Black Jacobins*—works that were markedly different in form and content from the earlier literary ones.

In spite of the dramatic nature of this categoric shift that accompanied the birth of James, the political theorist, this movement of *a priori* categories from literary/ludic poeticism to sociohistorical poetics took place for the most part below James’ conscious awareness. In other words, although James experienced this change he could not make it explicit and give a full account of its transcendental aspects.

In his forties, James experienced the categoric foundations of this Trotskyist self “draining out” of him. When it was all over, he would emerge as an independent theorist of working-class self-organization. However, with this third major intellectual change James found it necessary to make the whole process as conscious as possible—from the difficulties his older Trotskyist self had with letting go of its central position to the decentering of its *a priori* categories and making room for the new knowing subject with its categories of worker self-organization. In his effort to make more conscious these transcendental aspects of his third major transition, James turned to Hegel’s dialectical logic of *a priori* categories for help.

At the same time that James was letting his once cherished Trotskyist self die its natural death, he was acutely aware that many of his fellow Trotskyists were stubbornly resisting this death and the transition to what it was heralding. Consequently, a major part of the context for writing *Notes on Dialectics* was James’ effort to pass on to his fellow Trotskyists the power of Hegel’s dialectical logic to guide and lubricate this transition that they would have to go through. In short, there were multiple factors motivating James’ interest in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*.

## JAMES AND HEGEL'S SCIENCE OF LOGIC

Early in his exposition of the *Science of Logic* in *Notes on Dialectics*, James comments on its length, its extreme difficulty, and then explains, "I was able to find my way into it ... because I recognized from early on that the *Logic* constituted an algebra, made to be used in any analysis of constitution and development in nature or in society" (1980, 8). As such a general algebra of the *a priori* categories governing the constitution, perception, and understanding of the development of natural, social, and individual formations, this discourse had to be a highly abstract and difficult exercise in thinking and reflecting on that thinking. In other words, this Hegelian algebra would require the raising of thinking to the second power. Given these difficulties, James' strategy for making the benefits of this algebra more accessible to his fellow Trotskyists was to apply it to the constitution and development of the international labor movement with which they were already familiar.

James' point of entry into the *Science of Logic* is the different *a priori* subject/object relationships that were operative in particular knowing situations—such as that of an everyday person, a Newtonian physicist, or a Trotskyist. Equally important for both James and Hegel as the existence of these subject/object relationships was how they imperceptibly changed from one into the other. This was the transcendental dialectic that James was particularly interested in at the time. He agreed with Hegel that these always presupposed subject/object relationships were formations of mutual determination that often remained unrecognized. That is, the distinctive form of a specific knowing subject and its categoric frame for grasping objects of knowledge come into being together through a process of mutual determination. Thus the "I" of the knowing situation of an everyday person is correlated with the rise of specific constructions of substance and decline together. These different knowing situations also brought into being distinct sets of dualities and epistemic boundaries that facilitated particular modes of knowledge production and inhibited the use of others. These transcendental dynamics of changing subject/object relations and knowing situations and their correlated patterns of knowledge production was James' point of entry into Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

Given this view of knowing or epistemic situations, James' first methodological observation is the following: if we as knowing subjects are to grasp "the spontaneous development of process in real life" (1980, 8), then we cannot view any object of knowledge only as "Substance" but must also come to know it as "Subject." As Substance, we tend to see both epistemic subject and the object of knowledge as clearly determined and existing within definite boundaries that should not be transgressed. Further, James agreed with Hegel

that these apparently “fixed” appearances are not just a property of the object of study but also the result of the work of a particular set of categories of the knowing subject (1980, 20). In this coproduction of the apparent permanence of the knowing subject and the object before it, James emphasized the constitutive work of the categories of what Kant called “the Understanding.” For James, these are the *a priori* categories that enable us to create the discursive formations—such as universals, abstract identities, and laws—with which we co-construct the permanence of subjects and objects of knowledge.

However, when we approach the object of knowledge as subject, it is precisely this categoric infrastructure of permanence that we must be able to dissolve and surpass. Within the permanent formations of the understanding we must be able to see the binary opposites that are in sharp conflict. Even more basic, we must be able to dissolve the Understanding’s construction of the subject/object relationship and its correlated *a priori* categories of subject and object constitution. This transcendental work is going to be necessary for us to see what the object was before it reached this particular point in its formation and what it might be after it. However, to dissolve the “fixing” and other constitutive effects of the Understanding, we are going to need the aid of two epistemic capabilities: the first is that of a phenomenological suspension, which would enable us to interrupt or halt the “fixing” operations of the Understanding. The second is a self-reflective dialogical logic such as Hegel’s. In other words, we are going to need a logic that can grasp the rise and fall, or “the draining out,” of one subject/object relationship and the rise of another. It is important to stress here that this new logic must come with a change in the knowing subject as an integral part of a new knowing situation.

Within this developing epistemic situation, the new knowing subject that is making use of dialectical reason is able to discern things that the knowing subject of the Understanding could not. He/she is able to see more clearly the deeper and much larger unity of which both knowing subject and object of knowledge are parts. For Hegel, this larger whole was the original unity of Divine being and wisdom—the world of Spirit. Also for Hegel, James tells us, this dialectical perspective reveals the formation of both epistemic subject and object to be fragmentary and individualizing movements out of the original Divine unity. At the same time, it also discloses the existence of active tendencies working for the return of both subject and object to the original Divine unity. This circular view of both epistemic subject and object is how life appears from the dialectical perspective of Subject as opposed to Substance. However, here James parts company with Hegel as he rejects the notion of Spirit. For James these circular movements of subjects and objects disclosed by dialectical reason were seen as arising out of an unthematizable stream of spontaneous creativity. They would continue until human beings live in societies where they are all seen as the Subject they are, and finally

come to rest back in that creative stream. But in spite of this divergence, James agreed with Hegel that a good dialectical thinker must be able to make the transcendental shift out of the categories of everyday perception, to those of the understanding, and out of the latter to those of dialectical reason. This was the discourse that James used to make more explicit to himself and others the categoric foundations of his transition from Trotskyism to worker-controlled socialism.

From this brief account of James' exposition of Hegel's dialectical method, we should take with us at least six key points that will be vital for the creolization thesis that we will develop in the second half of this paper. First is the impermanence of all our knowing situations and the inherent possibilities of one being displaced by another. Second, that within these knowing situations subject and object mutually determine each other, come into being together, and dissolve together. Third, within the fixed and permanent appearances created by the Understanding there are binary opposites that are in conflict and thus the source of inner contradictions. Fourth, in spite of their universal or ahistorical features, these *a priori* categories and epistemic structures are also historically inscribed. Fifth, there is the inherent and spontaneous creativity that James saw in Hegel's concept of Subject, but to which he gave materialist and creative realist interpretations. Sixth and finally, the blockages to the inherent creative push for self-organization and self-development were not just external but also had roots in the attachments of epistemic subjects to aging self-constructions and their related categories of knowledge production.

## **BETWEEN JAMES AND HEGEL: DIALECTIC AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND CREOLIZATION**

In our discussion of James' interest in Hegel's dialectic, I suggested that this interest was in part rooted in the power of this dialectic to illuminate a number of major intellectual transformations that James had gone through. In particular, it was the inner transformation that facilitated James' transition from a Trotskyist political theorist and activist to a theorist and activist on behalf of worker self-organization that initiated this intense engagement with Hegel. This engagement can also be seen as one important basis from which James creolized Hegel. As an Afro-Caribbean creole thinker, James' roots are to be found in the broader creolizing dynamics of Caribbean culture. These dynamics have been driven by colonial processes of forced mixing or cultural hybridization as well as by voluntary borrowings from the Western and Indian heritages. Well-known creole formations such as calypso, reggae, or creole languages are those that have moved beyond the initial phases of mixing to fashion an original synthesis out of culturally different elements.



In the case of conscious borrowings there is usually a convergence of experiences and intellectual interests or a sharp divergence that motivate these intense discursive engagements that lead to processes of creolization. Although James did not write extensively on Hegel's self-development and the changes in epistemic subjects that it entailed, I want to suggest here that a convergence in experiences is vital for grasping the intuitive appeal of Hegel's dialectic for James. Thus, as an integral part of exploring James' creolization of Hegel, I intend to show that the development of the Hegelian dialectic grew out a series of changes in his epistemic subjects that can be usefully compared to the four major transformations in James' subject formation. In other words, the secret connection between James and Hegel is that they share an inner correlation between dialectic and self-transformation.

## DIALECTIC AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION IN HEGEL

Hegel was born into a Lutheran family in Stuttgart, Germany in 1770. As a young man at the Stuttgart Gymnasium, Hegel showed strong interests in religion and history. At the age of seventeen, he wrote the paper "On the Religion of the Greeks and Romans" (Crites 1998, 14–15). The providential agency of Divinity is a major constitutive principle of this essay from Hegel's youth. Much later, in *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel tells us that as a young man he experienced his life as being guided by the power of the universal mind and defends its providential agency as a mature philosopher (1967a, 217). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that his Lutheranism was the source of both his strong religious identity and his growing scholarly interest in religion. Thus, when in 1788 Hegel began attending the University of Tübingen, he enrolled in its Divinity School with plans to become a minister of the church.

However, in spite of the definite presence of this strong religious identity, there was clearly much more to Hegel as a youthful subject. Another essay from this early period, "On the Judgment of Commonsense about the Objectivity and Subjectivity of Ideas," points to a very active but subordinate site of philosophical creativity within Hegel's wider and more encompassing psyche (Kroner 1971, 1). This subordination points to definite tensions between these two creative centers of Hegel's developing subjectivity. The ongoing tensions between these two poles of religious and philosophical creativity will become an important driving force and wellspring in the development of Hegel's thought both religious and philosophical. In time, this subordinate site of philosophical creativity will mature in subjective and discursive capabilities to the point of displacing and incorporating the formerly dominant religious identity. In the course of the pushes and pulls, the fusions and fissions between them, these personas-in-formations would continuously



release profound insights into the transformations they were going through and also into the creative ground out of which these transformations were springing. The specific contents of these emissions from these personas-in-information and in-conflict will become vital elements shaping the nature of Hegel's dialectical philosophy.

The first significant manifestations of these tensions between Hegel's religious and philosophical personas can be seen in his first critiques of Christianity in the light of Greek religion. In his essay, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," Hegel is concerned with the reified, dogmatic, and authoritarian tendencies that had overtaken Christianity after the death of its founder and robbed it of its earlier spiritual aliveness (1971, 68–81). These tendencies toward doctrinal hardening, creeds to be memorized, institutionalized hierarchies, rules to be obeyed, and a widening distance between God and humanity are what Hegel had in mind by the positivity that had overtaken Christianity. He explored this problem of positivity in the Christian religion by comparing it with the less rigid structures of the folk religions of Classical Greece.

Although the subjective aspirations of Greek folk religion were given objective forms, Hegel argued that his comparisons showed that the objective forms of Greek religion are less burdened by problems of positivity. In spite of their necessary objective forms, Greek folk religions were seen as remaining open to and expressive of popular subjectivity. In this regard, they were quite different from the theological and clergy-dominated structures of Christianity. It was this balance in Greek religion between objectivity and subjectivity—which favored the latter—that appealed to Hegel and resonated with the ferment that was clearly shaking the foundations of his own religious identity. A religious practice with greater space for individual experience and creativity was now calling Hegel. This early critique of Christianity makes clear that Hegel was moving away from his Lutheran moorings and was now in search of a new religious identity in which a rational and critical subjectivity was not so overwhelmed by the positive aspects of its institutionalized forms.

The search for a Christian practice of this type emerges even more directly in the essay, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," which Hegel published two years later (1971, 182–301). In this composition, he continues the comparisons with Greek folk religions, but now adds the moral philosophy of Kant. Two works by the latter are particularly important here: the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. This turn to Kant provides support for our claim regarding a very active site of philosophical creativity operating within Hegel. Kant's distillation of the moral elements of religion that did not offend the norms of philosophical reason appealed to Hegel at this point in his development. He made Kant's moralism and Greek folk religion the critical lenses through which he would now view

his Christian heritage. As we will see, something dramatic had occurred in the life of his religious persona. Thus, the new view of his Christian heritage will be a complex synthesis of the results of the added Kantian critique and the new stage in its development reached by Hegel's religious persona.

However, it is important to note here that the above absorbing of Kant did not just add fuel to Hegel's ongoing revolt against the positivity of his Christian heritage. It also strengthened significantly the still subordinate site of philosophical creativity within him and contributed to its further discursive development, potential independence, and future dominance. As two developing identities, the ego-constitutive and existential dynamics between them must have been such that they were in conflict and relations of domination. Their subsequent reconciliatory resolution—as opposed to the dominance of one over the other—will later leave its mark all over Hegel's dialectical approach to philosophy.

Returning to the religious transformation mentioned above, the strongest evidence for it is the very different note of reconciliation on which “The Spirit of Christianity” ends as compared to the one on positivity. This note of reconciliation reflects a process of inner growth and transformation that enabled the religious center of Hegel's subjectivity to live and affirm the life of what Richard Kroner called a “Christian mystic” (1971, 8). The end of this essay makes clear the new way of seeing existence that came with this dramatic expansion of religious and spiritual capabilities. This new way of seeing the totality of being was that of a mystically mediated vision of the providence of a Divine Love that was capable of reconciling the opposition between religious subjectivity and its necessary forms of objectification and possible positivity. This providence of Divine Love achieves these reconciliations in ways that went beyond the reach of Kant's moralism, which Hegel now sees as leaving the subject-object dualism unresolved.

This dualism, which is an important one for Hegel, is not an isolated opposition. On the contrary, as we have seen, it is systematically linked to a whole network of other dualisms such as ego/nature, spirit/matter, universal/particular, Divine/human, eternal/temporal, individual/collective, and religion/philosophy. At the end of the essay on positivity, Hegel was in search of an all-inclusive reality in which these dualities and the religious positivity they produced could be reconciled and transcended without being completely negated by this all-encompassing unity. At the end of this essay, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate,” Hegel is convinced that he has found this reconciling presence in his spiritually mediated experiences of Divine Love. We can assume here that profound inner transformations, such as those Hegel's religious persona experienced, open up possibilities for spiritual literacy and insight that were previously absent, and thus for ending our separation from God. At this point in his development Hegel insists that it is only through

this state of spiritually mediated union and participation that humans are able to glimpse the world from a Divine perspective and experience the genuine reconciliation of the dualisms of knowing situations that fragment our lives and generate the dead weight of religious positivity.

From the perspective of this Divine glimpse of existence, Hegel also arrives at a new reconciliation of the conflicts between his philosophical and religious personas—one that left the former still in the subordinate position. This still subordinate position of philosophy follows from the fact that the Divine unification of opposites is a primary reality and thus prior to and must be presupposed by the creative and representational work of philosophy. The latter cannot produce this unity of opposites out of its own creative codes and capabilities. Thus in his 1800 composition, “Fragment of a System,” Hegel insisted that “philosophy must stop short of religion, just because it is a process of thinking,” and therefore involves oppositions of its own such as that between the thinker and what is thought (1971, 313). In short, although the need for philosophy arises from the network of dualisms that fragment our lives, philosophy can recognize the problem but not solve it, as it is unable to reach that Divine Unity in which all dualisms are reconciled.

However, this particular resolution to Hegel’s inner problems of subject formation and his outer problems of a religious practice free of unnecessary positivity was not a final one. In particular, as his philosophical persona went through another round of transformative growth, this resolution would have to be substantially revised and along with it the discursive expressions of both his religious and philosophical personas. In the case of Hegel this intimate and consistent connection between inner and outer cannot be overlooked for too long without the risk of grave error.

The clearest signs of a shift away from the inner resolution and outer compromise between religion and philosophy just discussed came with the completion of *The Difference between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy* in 1801. This shift was further reinforced between 1802 and 1803 by the essays Hegel wrote for the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*—a new publication he had started with Shelling. This was clearly a very productive period for Hegel and one in which his philosophical persona experienced the major transformation that would make it the equal of and eventually overtake his religious persona.

For the discursive traces of this transforming and empowering experience, the essay “Faith and Knowledge” from the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* is particularly important (Crites 1998, 178–97). In this essay, we can observe Hegel beginning to see philosophy more in the light of the vision of existence disclosed by the unifying power of Divine Love. To grasp this crucial moment in his philosophical development, we can only assume that this turn to Divine Love was a response of his philosophical persona to the advances made by his

bigger religious brother. Without evidence of force or artifice, there is a major change in the voice of this younger philosophical persona. It now speaks with the voice and experience of a philosophical mystic and sees the work of philosophy as including knowledge of that original unity, which at the end of “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” could only be reached by religion. The two key poles of subject formation in Hegel are moving closer to each other and are now just about equal in self-organizing and discursive capabilities. These experiences of his religious and philosophical subjectivities moving away from and back to the original Divine Unity were no doubt the origins of those circular movements that Hegel will later systematize in *The Phenomenology of Mind* and the *Science of Logic*—movements that James would creolize according to the codes of his creative realism.

As it took the awakening of the Divine in Hegel’s religious persona to make accessible the providence of Divine Love, so too in the case of the unity of Divine Wisdom, access to it required the awakening of something akin to the Divine in Hegel’s philosophical persona. Only spirit can know spirit, Hegel tells us repeatedly. Further, in making this case for two separate transformations leading to participation in the Divine Vision, we are suggesting that within the dualism that had existed up until now between these two poles of Hegel’s subjectivity we cannot readily assume that what one persona knows the other also does and accepts.

For the Hegel of “Faith and Knowledge,” the enterprise of philosophy is very different from the position taken in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate.” Because of its new access to its own founding depths, philosophy at its highest became reason—reflection on the philosopher’s own circular movements out of the living unity of Divine Wisdom into states of division, clashing dualisms and contradictions, the overcoming of these conflicts, and returning to the Divine Unity. Because philosophy can now by itself reach its own foundations in the original unity of being, it no longer has to stop short of religion, but can travel right alongside it and provide testimony of its own. This is the big shift that “Faith and Knowledge” introduces.

It was Hegel’s commitment to producing this consciousness of philosophy’s independent access to the original unity of being that facilitated the rise to dominance of the philosophical pole of his unusual process of subject formation. The awesome energy and creativity that informed later works such as *The Phenomenology of Mind* are inseparable from the energy, creativity, and self-revelations released by this persona in its new phase of self-organization. These revelations regarding this new phase in its self-formation and its reconciliatory move from a subordinate to a dominant position became the distinctive contents of the new dialectic that appeared for the first time in *The Phenomenology of Mind*. In terms of its power, depth, scope, and other proportions, this work surpassed all of Hegel’s earlier productions. Hegel, the

philosopher, had undoubtedly come into his own, had decentered and incorporated in a friendly manner the vision and creativity of his once dominant religious brother. From this point on it becomes very difficult for the average scholar to read Hegel without having a significant measure of access to the foundations of his/her own processes of subject formation, as Hegel deployed this knowledge without warning or much explanation. It is in this sense that we can understand Richard Kroner's observation that Hegel's "skill seems neither teachable or imitable" (1971, 44). However, it was precisely the partial access to the foundations of his own self-formation that James possessed which enabled him to read and engage Hegel's complex dialectical moves.

## DIALECTIC AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION IN JAMES

James was born in Tunapuna, Trinidad in 1901, the start of the era that would see the decline of British imperial power. In *Beyond a Boundary*, a mature James, reflecting on his youth, noted: "two people lived in me" (2005, 36). He goes further and tells us: "my life up to ten had laid the powder for a war that lasted without respite for eight years, and intermittently for some-time afterwards—a war between English Puritanism, English literature and cricket, and the realism of West Indian life" (2005, 27). By "the realism of West Indian life" James was no doubt referring to the realities of life among the black colonized working-class from which his parents were determined to save him. Being clearly gifted, James' parents and teachers had a path away from that "realism" all laid out for him. He was to win a scholarship to one of the leading secondary schools, from there to university in England, and back to Trinidad as a legal or medical professional. James did win that scholarship to Queens Royal College. However, before winning it, he had already made two strong counter-identifications to those of his parents: counter-identifications with the game of cricket and with English literature.

While in high school this inner "war" intensified rather than subsided. Instead of working toward his professional future, James used the resources of Queens Royal College to cultivate the identifications he had made with the cricket of the black working-class and with English literature. James tells us: "all I wanted to do was to play cricket and soccer . . . and nothing could stop me" (2005, 36). Thus the war intensified with a very definite outcome. James states it very succinctly: "I fought and won" (2005, 28). So was born the epistemic subject of James' ludic/literary persona that we have already met along with the texts it produced. It emerged by overwhelming the professional persona that had the support of parents, church, and teachers.

But as we have seen, this was just the first of three more, but much less violent, transformations that James would experience (Buhle 1988). As he

was going through the third—the transition from Trotskyism to worker self-organized socialism—James was in search of a theory that would illuminate these changes. I have suggested that James found that theory in Hegel’s dialectic and that this illumination was the basis for his engagement with and creolization of “the Maestro.” This illumination was possible because Hegel’s dialectic was a discursive systematization of inner changes that were similar to the ones James was going through.

To make clearer the specific nature of this connection between James and Hegel, we can take a quick look at the relation between dialectic and self-formation in Jonathan Edwards and Søren Kierkegaard. Jonathan Edwards was the well-known founder of American Calvinism. In his “Personal Narrative,” Edwards tells us that two persons live in him (1998). Like Hegel, one was religious and the other was a naturalist philosopher, influenced by Newton and Locke, and who resisted the semiotic positivity that had overcome American Christianity. Edwards framed his religious development around three awakenings that were put back to sleep by alternating periods of secularism. The “inward struggles and conflicts” between these two poles of subjectivity were very intense—producing periods of deep depression (1998, 791–5). It was during one of these secular periods that Edwards produced his best philosophical writings.

The outcome of these inward struggles was the overwhelming victory of Edwards’ religious persona. He tells us: “I was brought wholly to break off all former wicked ways” (1998, 791). Here there were no inner movements toward mutual recognition as in the case of Hegel and James’ last three transitions. Edwards’ philosophical persona survived but could only collect notes for a book on Divine semiotics that was never completed. Edwards’ self-formation was such that it crushed the possibilities for an expansive philosophical dialectic such as Hegel’s, and thus one that could have illuminated James’ experience as fully.

Søren Kierkegaard was a famous Danish existential philosopher and religious thinker. In Kierkegaard, we can also note the intense inner conflicts that developed between the poles of his subjectivity—the aesthetic and the religious—with the philosopher as arbitrator. What was distinctive about Kierkegaard’s experience and its philosophical representation was its focus on the inhibited and self-negating life of an overwhelmingly defeated persona. This was a life that was simultaneously one of quiet resigned despair and defiant potentiated despair. In the first case, the defeated persona is “in despair at not willing to be itself” (1954, 180). In the second, he/she is “in despair at willing to be itself” (1954, 180). Although diametrically opposed, the existential logic of despair is such that the first of these two (a despair of weakness) calls forth the second (a despair of defiance). But in calling forth this defiant response, the defeated persona only elicits greater wrath from

his/her vanquisher. This increased repression intensifies the original refusal to be oneself and starts a new round of this viscous cycle. Some of Edwards' experiences could be grasped in terms of this anxious cycle.

The sharp difference here in the experiences of Hegel and Kierkegaard is that for the latter there is no movement out of this existential dilemma—it is “the sickness unto death.” Kierkegaard locates its roots in our separation from God and, in theory, should be resolvable by a return. However, it is precisely this path back that Kierkegaard experiences as blocked. For him there were no circular movements capable of grounding a dialectic such as Hegel's or James'. In Kierkegaard, the dialectic is the calling forth of its opposite by a self in despair. Speaking of despair, he tells us: “all its symptoms are dialectical” (1954, 157).

With this view of the relationship between dialectic and self-formation, it should be clear that Kierkegaard could not have illuminated James' experiences as fully as Hegel's. As in the case of Edwards, there was a blocking of the movements of self-transformation for which James was seeking a deeper understanding. From his reading of Wilson Harris through Heidegger and Sartre, it would appear as though James found more of an existential echo in the latter two (1989a, 57–61). It was precisely the possibilities for personas to move beyond intrasubjective conflicts and related anxieties toward phases of mutual recognition and cooperation, and finally back to their shared roots in an unthematizable stream of spontaneous creativity that made Hegel's dialectic appealing to James. It is only after seeing the special nature of this connection that we can grasp how the creolizing of Hegel became a part of the fourth major synthesis of James' intellectual life.

## THE CREOLE ASPECTS OF JAMES' MATURE DIALECTIC

The text that both expresses and embodies James' fourth major transformation is, of course, *Beyond a Boundary*. In this text, he makes reference to the change in the following way: “I was increasingly aware of large areas of human existence that my politics and history did not seem to cover” (2005, 198). What were these areas not covered by his politics of worker self-organization? It was the area of human existence affirmed by James' ludic/literary persona—in particular the ideals and projects to which people devote their lives. Consequently, this new focus on the ideals by which people lived was also the creative expression of another important shift in the epistemic subject out of which James was writing in the 1960s. This important change was the reclaiming of that long lost ludic/literary persona that had drained out of him to make way for the Trotskyist political theorist. It would now be integrated with the post-Trotskyist political persona. As with Hegel and



also with James' earlier transitions, the fissions and fusions of this fourth one produced creative emissions of great insight, which filled the pages of *Beyond a Boundary*. This was the kind of intrasubjective resolution that was not possible in Edwards and Kierkegaard. With this more comprehensive integration, James achieved a new level of wholeness and with it the greater creative powers needed for a dialectical synthesis of culture, economics, politics, and sports—and cricket in particular. This is the great dialectical achievement of *Beyond a Boundary*. The dialectical synthesis of this text, its epistemic subject, and its *a priori* categories are all very different from those of the works of James' post-Trotskyist period such as *The Invading Socialist Society* and *State Capitalism and World Revolution*.

This reincorporation of a now more mature ludic/literary persona brought with it corresponding changes in the *a priori* categories of James' epistemic subject and the knowing situation that he could make use of and inhabit. Particularly in the case of the writing subject of *Beyond a Boundary*, the new transcendental order of supporting categories can best be described as a poetic sociohistoricism. The categories that once informed James' cricket and literary writing reappear here with greater analytic powers and abilities to harmonize with the categories of the political theorist. This shift from a socio-historical poeticism to a poetic sociohistoricism was not the intrasubjective "war" by which the original ludic/literary persona was established, nor the "draining out" that marked its decline. Rather, it was a much more friendly coming-together that can be compared to the manner in which Hegel's philosophical persona surpassed but incorporated its older religious brother. In the writing subject of *Beyond a Boundary* there is a trading of places between James' political theorist and the revived literary/ludic poeticist. The creative codes and categories of the latter dominate the composition of the text without arresting or negating James' ability to address political issues. James' poetic sociohistoricism is indeed a new synthesis and a new adventure in the history of dialectics.

The distinctive contribution of this original, and therefore creole, synthesis is the highly visible place that it gives to sports. Cricket in particular returns here as a "discourse" in its own right with unique self-formative contributions of its own. James achieves this integration of sports by arguing that organized sports was an area overlooked by his politics and that athletes had been eclipsed by actors, novelists, and philosophers. Here James successfully integrates athletes and his ludic persona, along with other artists, into the larger sociogenic and humanizing processes by which human civilizations have advanced.

Dealing specifically with cricket, James made the case that it was one of the arts and, as such, was a major carrier of the values and ideals by which many in England and the Caribbean lived. For him, cricket was first and



foremost a dramatic spectacle. Its internal organization was such that “at all times it is compelled to reproduce the central action which characterizes all good drama” (2005, 259). Further, James argued that cricket had many of the key qualities of a visual art. Its visual aspects resided in the lines, curves, pace, and pitch of the balls bowled and also in the lines, drives, pace, and movements of the batsmen. These formal dramatic and visual qualities of the game constituted a language that enabled it to encode and carry the projects and ideals by which people have lived. Hence we get the highly aesthetic descriptions of cricketers such as Matthew Bondsman, Learie Constantine, W.G. Grace, and others that fill the chapters of this book. This was the systematic inclusion of organized sports among the great cultural forces of human history that distinguishes *Beyond a Boundary* and the originality of its poetic sociohistoricism.

However, this powerful and innovative synthesis should not be taken as the final form of James’ mature dialectic. This dialectic has no such final form. Further, it posits no such relationship of permanent replacement between James’ political theorist and his revived ludic/literary poeticist. On the contrary, what follows the writing of *Beyond a Boundary* is a complex pattern of back and forth movements between his poetic sociohistoricism and his socio-historical poetics. In these movements the political theorist and revived ludic poeticist decentered each other as epistemic subjects and thus traded places depending on the object of knowledge holding James’ interest. These mutually decentering moves made it clear that James was well beyond the categoric difficulties of his Trotskyist period, which initiated his turn to Hegel. The transcendental domain with its epistemic subjects and correlated *a priori* categories had now become familiar terrain for James. The period of engagement with Hegel was an important step in James’ mastery of this domain.

### **CONCLUSION: JAMES, CREOLIZATION, AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY**

Having outlined the originality of the mature Jamesian dialectic, it is now easier to see the significance of its creole aspects. James’ dialectic is a creole formation in the sense that it has moved beyond the initial phases of borrowing and mixing that produces instances of cultural hybridization. Like well-known creole formations such as the calypso, reggae, or the Caribbean novel, James’ dialectic was an original synthesis that moved beyond his inheritances from Africana figures such as George Padmore, J.J. Thomas, or Matthew Bondsman and European figures such as Thackeray, Marx, Trotsky, or Hegel. As a result, the creolization of Hegel was a part of this larger synthesis.

As we have seen, the creolization of Hegel took the form of a sociohistorical recasting of the circular movements of social and natural formations out of and back to Spirit. In James' recasting, they became the movements of social formations out of an unthematizable stream of spontaneous creativity, aimed at creating societies in which all citizens would be seen as the subject they are, and the subsequent rediscovery of the roots of these different formations in the original stream of creativity. For both James and Hegel, the end was in the beginning. It was also within this circular framework, which had been revised by his earlier creative realism, that James' other ideas about the movements of *a priori* categories and knowing subjects were recast. In contrast to these transcendental issues, James borrowed nothing from Hegel on the issue of race. The place of race in the dialectics of James and Hegel are diametrically opposed. A similar divide marks the places of class and colonial/slave domination in their dialectics. In short, the borrowings from Hegel were very specific and were significantly recoded and reinterpreted by discourses such as James' creative realism, his literary/ludic poeticism, and his evolving discourses on class and race. These recoded borrowings from Hegel were then seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of his mature dialectic. As in all good creoles, one has to look carefully to find the borrowed strands of their fabrics.

Like other areas of Afro-Caribbean culture, the field of Afro-Caribbean philosophy that emerged in the colonial and postcolonial periods included a number of hybrid formations such as Afro-Christianity, Black Marxism, Black existentialism, and Black Feminism as well as neo-African discourses, which resisted these patterns of hybridization. Unlike the cases of Afro-Caribbean music, dance, or literature, most of the hybrid formations of Afro-Caribbean philosophy have not resulted in the seamless syntheses that would make them genuine creole achievements. The lack of academic recognition and cultivation that have reinforced codes of deep racial separation between a hegemonic European philosophy and colonized African philosophy have been major factors contributing to this comparative absence of well-recognized creole formations in Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

The importance of James' mature dialectic is that it's one of the real creole gems of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. It points the way to what is possible and what is likely to come in the future. Because of its complexity—linking sports, culture, and political economy through philosophy—it has been a difficult example for others to follow. But nonetheless, it is one of the best indicators of the form that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is likely to take.

## *Chapter Three*

# Thinking through the Negative

## *Adorno's Reading of Hegel*

Stefan Bird-Pollan

Adorno opens the first of his three studies to Hegel's philosophy with an emphatic rejection of the thought that those who come after Hegel could "evaluate" him simply because they are chronologically later than him. Rather, he insists, "If one does not want to miss Hegel with one's very first words, one must confront, however inadequately, the claim his philosophy makes to truth, rather than merely discussing his philosophy from above, and thereby from below" (Adorno 1993, 2; 1970a, 151). Thinking must be understood as thinking *through* Hegel rather than simply taking what one needs, evaluating what is "living and what is dead" in Hegel.<sup>1</sup> The project of creolizing Hegel can do no more; it can pursue a trajectory of thought which, if it leads somewhere, will lead somewhere because of the debt it owes to Hegel's philosophy as the opportunity to think dialectically or, as Adorno puts it, to move negatively through reason, rather than simply endorsing a facile and therefore differentiated thinking *about* the Hegel.<sup>2</sup>

The current reception of Hegel in the Anglo-American world has roughly embraced him as a constructivist of some stripe, that is, as someone who offers an interesting reconstruction of the basic elements of thought and social development. In the constructivist vein the work of two authors have been immensely influential. Robert Pippin, whose *Hegel's Idealism* (1989) gave Hegel studies roughly the shape it has now,<sup>3</sup> and Robert Brandom's continuing efforts to give Hegel a semantic reading have been equally influential.<sup>4</sup> While Pippin's approach has been concerned with textual fidelity, Brandom's has sought to reimagine Hegel for the twenty-first century. Both approaches read Hegel as a developmental thinker whose project is to be evaluated as it constructs itself, pulling in everything it touches. Both have rejected the view that Hegel is a thinker of totality *per se*, emphasizing Hegel's debt to Kant's critical project.<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on construction has run

roughly parallel with the Kant revival in Anglo-American philosophy, which took its impetus from Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>6</sup>

While the appropriation of Hegel by Robert Brandom deserves the title of creolization if any does, I intend to pursue a different trajectory in this chapter. My aim is to explore Adorno's reading of Hegel in order to emphasize Hegel's negativity, that is, the way in which Hegel's thinking ultimately runs counter to the achievement of a stable liberal state in the *Philosophy of Right* or a stable trustworthy conceptual scheme to be found at the end of the *Logic*. What I aim at here is a thinking of Hegel from the perspective of experience rather than from that of the concept. In doing so, however, I do not reject the constructivist, Kantian interpretations but rather seek to make its basic intuition—that subjectivity is necessarily constructed out of an interaction with nature in a positive way as well—intelligible from the side of receptivity to nature.

The approach of proceeding from experience to the concept has been most emphatically championed by Adorno, whose every sentence offers us a critique of the priority of the concept or, to put it in Adorno's terms, the priority of the subject. Adorno's own writings, however, offer almost nothing that is positive or constructive, which might make it appear as if his thought is tethered to a bleaker time, a time when the concept did indeed dominate but which has now itself been (triumphantly) overcome. I believe such a rejection or simply neglect of negativity for positivity in current constructive projects is a mistake. The creolization performed here is then strictly dialectical: I offer a critique of the current Hegel through Adorno and offer a critique of Adorno's *Hegelkritik* via elements Adorno himself discerns in Hegel.

More concretely this chapter develops four theses. In the first section, I argue that Adorno's conception of negativity should be understood as an elaboration of Kant's spontaneity-receptivity thesis. I also argue that Adorno's critique of modern philosophy in general—and, at times, of Kant and Hegel—is a critique of philosophy's tendency to conflate receptivity as unmediated negativity with already schematized intuitions. Treating the negative or experience itself as already mediated leads to the idea that the subject is the measure of all things, a type of thinking which Adorno characterizes as identity thinking. In the second section, I develop my third claim which is that identity thinking comes in two versions, one that is pathological and represents the overreach of the concept and one that is necessary and is compatible with nonidentity thinking. In the final section, I analyze Adorno's *Hegelkritik* in terms of the above distinctions, arguing that while Adorno is indeed right to see Hegel as guilty of certain instances of pathological identity thinking, Hegel's thought largely remains open to the negative, combining identity thinking and nonidentity thinking.

## ADORNO'S MODEL OF THE SUBJECT AND THE SPONTANEITY-RECEPTIVITY THESIS

As surely as Adorno's thinking is unthinkable without Hegel, so Hegel's thinking is unthinkable without Kant's. Underlying all three thinkers is a model of the subject, first articulated by Kant, which sees subject and object as existing in a normative relation. The normative relation opposes the traditional ontological relation in both the empiricist and the rationalist accounts, in which subjects and objects encounter each other as ontologically distinct. The model of the subject which I'd like to propose is transcendental or structural in the sense that the subject and the object are understood to be co-constituted as the differentiation of an original unity. I'll term the Kantian thesis according to which subjectivity constitutes itself out of its original transcendental (unthinkable without) relation to nature the spontaneity-receptivity thesis.

The central thought running through both the transcendental and dialectical models of the mind is that subject and object do not "encounter" each other as neutral terms but are themselves constituted only as subject and object as an abstraction of their original interrelation as thought and content. Programmatically Kant puts this as follows: "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant 1996, A51/B75).<sup>7</sup> That is, thought does not amount to anything if it is not *about* anything. There is no experience without something to *be* experienced. Nor can there be an object without the thought of the object. The object is thus the condition for the possibility of the subject's essential activity: thought.<sup>8</sup> I will call this relation a normative relation because subjectivity and objectivity are authoritative, that is, expressive of a certain relation only to the extent that they are *about* each other.

Kant elaborates this thesis further in his claim that underlying this distinction between thought and nature lie two transcendental capacities of mind: "Let us give the name *sensibility* to our mind's *receptivity*, [i.e., to its ability] to receive presentations insofar as it is affected in some manner. *Understanding*, on the other hand, is our ability to produce presentations ourselves, i.e., our *spontaneity* of cognition" (Kant 1996, A51/B75). Pushing Kant's official position a little further, we can thus say that subjectivity is actually *constituted* in interaction between the above two basic elements of mind which are now to be seen as the transcendental conditions of subjectivity. So much for the construction of the subject.

This transcendental model, which concerns the condition for the possibility of subjectivity, also reveals the inherently negative character of the relation between receptivity and spontaneity. The subject is constitutively open to

nature which, simply by presenting itself, gives the subject the opportunity to make itself into itself. Whatever comes to the subject out of its openness, however, is also owned by the subject as the self-constitution of the subject out of nature. This openness is characterized as negative because the subject is dependent on the object for its authority (and vice versa). Dependence means that receptivity constitutes the subject in a way which is unconceptually mediated—that is, the subject does not come into existence until it has done the thinking and has produced itself in performing the task of organizing nature and with that constituting itself. This means that, from the spontaneity-receptivity conception, the subject is transcendently open or negatively related to the object.

Any claim to an essence or basic identity on the part of the subject is then derivative of the history of the subject whether or not this history is acknowledged by the subject. Subjectivity is thus constituted out of a contingent response to nature. By the same token, however, the spontaneity-receptivity model insists that self-constitution is also an essential activity of thought on the part of the subject, performed in response to receptivity. The subject is not only its openness or negativity but also its constitution or positivity. The subject *is* what it makes itself out of what it *is not*.

Adorno gives a qualified acknowledgment of the correctness of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis in his important essay “On Subject and Object.”<sup>9</sup> He recognizes the necessity of the transcendental claim made above but is wary of the conclusions drawn from this thesis by philosophers in the idealist tradition who appear to tilt to the side of spontaneity or what Adorno calls the primacy of the subject.<sup>10</sup> In what follows I will first examine Adorno’s endorsement of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis and subsequently turn to his critique of the tradition for failing to adhere to it.

Echoing Kant’s claim that intuitions without concepts are blind, Adorno writes that the object cannot be without the subject. “Object, though attenuated, also is not without subject. If object itself lacked subject as a moment, then its objectivity would become nonsense” (Adorno 1970d, 756; 1998, 257). This thesis is relatively uncontroversial in the idealist tradition.

Turning to the other side of the thesis, however, that thoughts without content are blind, Adorno introduces an important qualification, designed to distinguish his understanding of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis from its elaboration in the thought of Kant, Hegel, and others. The distinction concerns the way in which the object constitutes the subject. Restating the basic reciprocity between subject and object, Adorno writes: “What is known through consciousness must be a something; mediation applies to something mediated.” The qualification comes in this important addition: “But subject, the epitome of mediation, is the ‘How’, and never, as contrasted to the object, the ‘What’ that is postulated by every conceivable idea for a concept of subject”

(Adorno 1970d, 746–47; 1998, 249). The important clarification here concerns the idea that this consciousness of the object is to be understood as a “how” rather than a “what.” This clarification suggests that despite the basically correct understanding of subject-object relations in Kant (and Hegel) the danger that the subject will be counted as more important than what it experiences is constant. The priority of the normative is registered in the “how” relation, in which subject and object are conceived of as qualitatively different only, hence as originating from a sort of original unity.<sup>11</sup> This symmetrical relation between receptivity and spontaneity crumbles when the normative relation between subject and object is replaced with an ontological one.

This point allows us to make a further important point. Adorno’s conception of the relation between subject and object, understood as the transcendental relation between receptivity and spontaneity, points to the underlying thesis that the ontological distinctness between subject and object is itself the product of the more fundamental transcendental spontaneity-receptivity relation discussed above.

In order to gain a better understanding of Adorno’s critique of the priority of the subject, which I claim Adorno characterizes as a misreading of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis, it is worth making a short detour through the German philosophical tradition in order to understand where Adorno thinks it goes wrong.<sup>12</sup> This will also get us a better understanding of how to distinguish between the subject’s necessary openness (as expressed in the spontaneity-receptivity thesis) and the subject bound by pathological identity thinking which Adorno seeks to root out. In order to get at the way Adorno formulates his critique, we need to understand better the relation between the spontaneity and receptivity at work in the subject.

Pace Kant’s claim that reason seeks the unconditioned for its conditions, spontaneity is to be understood as the process through which receptivity is organized.<sup>13</sup> As this organization is originary, however, it does not *already* possess a certain grammar but must rather *constitute* one. That is, in Kantian terms, we are here dealing with an operation closer to that of the faculty of judgment than that of the understanding, an operation which furnishes a schematized manifold of intuition which is only later subsumed under concepts by the understanding. Kant calls this activity of schematization “synthesis.”

While I believe that Kant’s concept of synthesis is not directly subject to Adorno’s critique, Adorno’s critique does track an important current in transcendental idealism. One way to understand the problem is to see that the process of synthesis is often assimilated to that of the process of subsumption in which an intuition is placed under a concept by the understanding to produce a cognition. The model of synthesis as subsumption takes it as given—and this is what Adorno objects to—that the subject’s conceptual scheme somehow pre-exists and has priority over that which it subsumes or judges.<sup>14</sup>



The problem with the notion of synthesis, as Adorno credits Hegel for already having recognized, is that synthesis on the model of the understanding leaves no place for the nonidentical.<sup>15</sup> “The will to identity works in each synthesis. As an a priori task of thought, a task immanent in thought, identity seems positive and desirable: the substrate of the synthesis is thus held to be reconciled with the I, and therefore to be good” (Adorno 1970c, 151; 1992, 148). That is, the notion of synthesis as constituting the identity of the subject out of undifferentiated nature (the Kantian manifold) thus harbors an ambiguity concerning the relation between subject and object. Is the object constituted as the *result* of the subject’s synthetic or spontaneous activity according to a pre-existing set of logical rules—in which case the subject could be understood as the *source* of the object—or is the object really co-constituted with the subject and subject and object constitute each other in an immediate relation, in which case the subject is always fundamentally indebted to the object and cannot be separated from it, as the spontaneity-receptivity model implies? The former option runs through the philosophical tradition, Hegel at times included. The latter option, which remains true to the negativity of receptivity, is the one Adorno seeks to rehabilitate against the tradition in what he calls nonidentity thinking.

As already suggested, Adorno’s critical reading of the tradition now gives rise to a further claim, namely that as derivatives of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis, subject and object, are in fact historical categories because they are the *product* of an interaction which can be conceived of only as transcendental. Spontaneity and receptivity are the terms for the conditions of the possibility of subject and object arising out of a contingent clash or, more classically, as the result of the self-differentiation of an original unity. This self-differentiation institutes history and subjectivity-objectivity at the same time.

Adorno writes: “The two concepts [subject and object] are resultant categories of reflection, formulas for an irreconcilability; they are not positive, primary states of fact but negative throughout, expressing nothing but nonidentity.... They are neither an ultimate duality nor a screen hiding ultimate unity. They constitute one another as much as—by virtue of such constitution—they depart from each other” (Adorno 1970c, 176; 1992, 174).

The critique of subject and object as historical categories constitutes a critique of epistemology, which takes as its starting point the ontological difference between subject and object as well as the fundamental givenness of these two terms. To make such an assumption is to privilege the subsumptive activity of the understanding over the holding activity of the faculty of judgment. If subject and object are the historical products of spontaneity and receptivity, then to claim that subject and object are ontologically basic represents a repression of the shared normative history of both terms.

This section has laid the Kantian groundwork for our understanding of Adorno's reading of Hegel. I have read Adorno's philosophical position through the spontaneity-receptivity thesis and this has enabled us to understand the negativity or openness of the subject. This openness then allowed us to distinguish the correct understanding of subjectivity from the deficient view which German idealism is tempted by—a direction which construes subject-object relations on the model of the understanding's subsumption of particular under universal. In what follows I'd like to elaborate on this reifying tendency at work in German idealism by introducing Adorno's second thesis, namely that philosophy and thinking in general have succumbed to identity thinking.

### **SPECIES OF THOUGHT, NONIDENTITY THINKING, IDENTITY THINKING, AND PATHOLOGICAL IDENTITY THINKING**

In the previous section I argued that Adorno thinks that the priority of the subject in German idealism is a deficient mode of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis. This argument must now be understood at the level of different manifestations or species of thought. Doing so will enable us to get at Adorno's critique and appreciation of Hegel and, more generally, at what Adorno criticizes in the modern tendency of thought to (pathological) identity thinking. Before pursuing pathological identity thinking, however, we must attend to the legitimate ways in which thought subsumes the particular under the universal as well as to nonidentity thinking. Only with these in hand can pathological identity thinking be understood.

If the S/R thesis is the basic model of thought, as I have argued, then we need to understand what becomes of thought as it determines itself further, constituting different types of mind-world relations. For Adorno, the constellation is the most basic kind of thinking. The constellation might be described with reference to what I characterize as the basic normative, the "how," relation between subject and object in which subject and object are not yet separate from each other. This normative relation between subject and object, for Adorno, is not some third thing or region which could be treated as having autonomous being of some sort. The constellation is that out of which the "what" or the ontological relation between subjects emerges through the work of thought. Adorno: "Every analysis of a judgment takes us to a subject and an object, but this fact does not create a region beyond those moments, a region that would be 'in itself.' The analysis results in the constellation of those moments, not in a third that would be superior, or at least more general" (Adorno 1970c, 111; 1992, 105).

The model of Kant's faculty of judgment for the constellation is suggested by several of Adorno's formulations.<sup>16</sup> The basic idea of Kant's faculty of judgment is that, unlike either practical reason and the understanding, which subsume particulars under universals, the faculty of judgment operates according to the presupposition that, as Kant puts it, "*Nature, for the sake of the power of judgment, makes its universal law specific [and] into empirical ones, according to the form of a logical system*" (Kant 1987, 20:216). That is, the faculty of judgment provides the particular to be conceptualized. However, as Kant insists just as strenuously as Adorno does, the particular here delivered by the faculty of judgment is not to be understood as already a conceptual achievement and hence can in no way stand on its own.

Kant calls the principle of the faculty of judgment purposiveness because at the level of the faculty of judgment the particular nature has not yet been made determinate by any further process of thought. It has not yet, as Adorno would say, become the predicate or object of judgment, but it could be. The judgment, Kant writes, is reflective rather than determinative.<sup>17</sup>

While Kant sees the particular held by reflective judgment as essentially waiting to be subsumed under a cognition, Adorno insists that this most general level of thought has its own organization and hence offers resistance to its subsumption under the concept. This resistance means that the non-identical manifests itself as opaque only when separated from its context or constellation.

Adorno writes: "Instead, what is indissoluble in any previous thought context transcends its seclusion in its own, as non-identical. It communicates with that from which it was separated by the concept. It is opaque only for identity's claim to be total; it resists the pressure of that claim. But as such it seeks to be audible" (Adorno 1970c, 165; 1992, 163).

The claim in this passage is that the nonidenticals or particular exists in an organized relation with other nonidenticals in the sense that nonidenticals stand to each other in their own proper organization just the same way that cognitions stand to each other in *their own* proper organization. They communicate with each other. However, and this is the important claim, the organization of nonidenticals is of a different sort than the organization under which cognitions stand. This means, Adorno now contented, that nonidenticals become opaque only when they are taken out of their proper organization and placed in a different one. Adorno's point is that the two types of organization, while themselves internally coherent, are not related as genus and species without the loss of what is particular to the nonidentical.

To put it another way, turning of the nonidentical as "nature" or "materiality" into a concept is not done without a loss to the nonidentical's proper internal constitution. The demand to give itself up to cognition thus constitutes a violation of the nonidentical, at the same time that it constitutes a

necessary element in differentiation of the world into subject and object. The nonidentical's own organization persists in the cognition as the cognition's negative element or that element which betrays the cognition as claiming to be what it is not: total.

Staying with the contrast between the two versions of the S/R thesis for a moment, we can elucidate nonidentity thinking a little further by seeing that identity and nonidentity thinking must themselves exist as the two species of the genus of thought itself. Moreover, if, as I've argued, the S/R thesis is the basic form of thought, then we can compare nonidentity thinking and identity thinking as two modes of thought which are both about the nonidentical as receptivity but in different ways. Nonidentity thinking is about the nonidentical in the mode of allowing the nonidentical to persist while identity thinking is about the subsumption of the nonidentical under concepts or universals in a way which either does away with the nonidentical or permits it to persist. The former is the pathological version and the latter the non-pathological version of identity thinking.

Let us look a little more closely at what is at stake in nonidentity thinking. Two points are to be made, that all thinking, however conceptual, is *also* a thinking of the nonidentical and that this "also" thinking of the nonidentical is what makes nonidentity thinking as a distinct type of thought different from the two types of identity thinking.

The first point is made by Adorno in the following claim: "The force that shatters the appearance of identity is the force of thinking: the use of 'it is' undermines the form of that appearance, which remains inalienable just the same" (Adorno 1970c, 152; 1992, 149). In this passage Adorno suggests two things. The first is that the relation between the nonidentical, as content, and the form that it is placed under by thought is ineluctable. No kind of thinking can help but place the nonidentical under a form of some sort. This is merely a consequence of the S/R thesis.

The second point, however, is that the form the nonidentical is necessarily placed under is itself only appearance (*Schein*) to the extent that it is a covering over of the nonidentical's particular characteristics (characteristics which are not grasped by form). At the S/R or genus level of thinking itself, we have a dialectic between the nonidentical and the identical which is irreducible. This dialectic, as I've already pointed out, is the result of the particular organization of the nonidentical at the hands of spontaneity.

In order to get at Adorno's deeper critique of identity thinking, however, we must track the two ways in which the genus of thought works itself out, that is, what we might call identity thinking and nonidentity thinking proper. To make this contrast we need an account of nonidentity thinking as a separate kind of thinking or "identifying" which does not subsume in the same way identity thinking does. Adorno writes: "Dialectically, cognition of nonidentity

lies also in the fact that this very cognition identifies—that it identifies to a greater extent, and in other ways, than identity thinking. This cognition seeks to say what something is, while identity thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself” (Adorno 1970c, 152; 1992, 149).

The first crucial thing to note is that nonidentical thinking can and does “identify.” Nonidentity thinking instantiates the form-giving capacity of thinking by placing the nonidentical under form through indication, that is, by stating that something *is* rather than what category it *falls under*, as identity thinking does. So nonidentity thinking states, makes claims, but does not place these claims within the exchange economy of the sign characteristic of the understanding.

The model for the sort of identity articulated by nonidentity thinking is the claim of suffering, a claim which is authoritative of its own right and demands no context; it cannot be relativized.<sup>18</sup> This very thought, the thought that the nonidentical could itself be authoritative of itself alone, is put thus by Adorno: “Living in the rebuke that the thing is not identical with the concept is the concept’s longing to become identical with the thing. This is how the sense of nonidentity contains identity” (Adorno 1970c, 152; 1992, 149). That is, behind nonidentity thinking’s critique of the concept as making everything fungible lies the hope that one day the mere fact or consciousness of the “what is” of the nonidentical might be enough to authorize the concept. Nonidentity thinking dreams of gaining its authority from what it states rather than from what it is subsumable under.

I’ve just argued that nonidentity thinking constitutes a species of the more generic S/R thesis found in all thought. This nonidentity species of thought identifies content but without thereby making it fungible. Nonidentity thinking seeks its authority from the content it indicates rather than from the form it gives to this content. With this in mind, we can now examine identity thinking in its non-pathological as well as pathological versions.

Identity thinking is the subsumption of nonidentity into concepts according to historically developed and intersubjectively recognized rules. The process of subsumption intrudes, as we saw above, on the organization of nonidenticals in the constellation since subsumption substitutes its own organizational scheme for that found in the constellation. Adorno, as we have also seen, recognizes the need for this sort of construction for the simple reason that humans desire to maintain life in the face of a nature which threatens it. Taken in this neutral way, identity thinking is the sort of thinking that is performed by Kant’s understanding, which makes sense of the world in an intersubjectively intelligible way without taking a stand on the origin of the (empirical) concepts it employs, hence maintaining an openness to concept revision when the particulars to be made intelligible appear in a new way.<sup>19</sup>

For Adorno, the way to understand the development of identity thinking's effacement of its own historical origins is to track the ever-increasing authority the concept arrogates to itself. This development tracks the gradual transition from the primitive priority of the object to which the subject had to adapt to the modern priority of the subject which dominates and even effaces the object.

The history of the effacement of the concept's history can be divided into two stages, the priority of the object in mimesis and the propriety of the subject in identity thinking. Let us begin with mimesis. Mimesis is the first historical manifestation of the concrete relation humans have to their surroundings. Mimetic thinking is a movement of thought in which nature is understood in terms of human subjectivity, that is, nature is animated and explained in the same way human behavior is. Nature's terrifying lack of interest in humans is denied by anthropomorphizing nature; an angry god is better than indifferent nature. This is the basic function of magic, which seeks to animate the material world so as to share in nature's power over human life.<sup>20</sup>

Mimetic thinking, however, is condemned to repeat itself to the extent that it does not achieve distance from what it is trying to imbue with sense. Mimetic thinking does not have sufficient distance from nature to grasp nature *as* nature, and hence cannot forge a conceptual framework through which to dominate nature. Mimesis' limitation consists in the fact that it is essentially ahistorical, hence having no relation to its own arisenness. Without a stable concept of nature, humans are condemned to the eternal return of nature. Without the concept of history, humans can make sense of their position in nature and even of themselves in no more than an *ad hoc* way.<sup>21</sup>

From this perspective, the development of the concept proper and with it of history itself represents a huge advance. For the concept—so goes the hope of enlightenment—if it could indeed subsume nature or the nonidentical—would be able to halt the suffering of the human at the hands of nature once and for all. This is the sense that by stabilizing nature through the concept, nature can be instrumentalized in the service of human need. Adorno and Horkheimer summarize the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “We have no doubt—and herein lies our *petitio principii*—that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. We believe we have perceived with equal clarity, however, that the very concept of that thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today” (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, xvi; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, 9–10).

That is, the subsumption of nature under the concept is essential to human freedom in the sense that only in this way can nature be organized according to human freedom. This is the thought also at the core of Kant's critical

project and of Hegel's philosophy. Humans must organize nature and the only way to do this is through the concept.

However, and this is the other central thesis which Horkheimer and Adorno find at work in Hegel, the work of the concept also dominates those who use it. The subject who wields the concept becomes subservient to it. To the extent that the concept empowers humans to dominate nature, the concept also makes humans dependent on this very domination. The concept dominates the subject to the extent that it suggests *in its very activity of subsumption* that the subsumption, conceptualization, represents the final and complete achievement of the domination of nature. The more humans trust the concept to subdue nature, the more experience of nature they must cede to the concept.

The pressure of this self-imposed necessary conceptual scheme makes identity thinking totalizing. The price of this conceptual stability is that of immobilizing nature. While the hallmark of magic is to animate immaterial life, the rationality basic to identity thinking or enlightenment kills life. Adorno and Horkheimer write: "The reason that represses mimesis is not merely its opposite. It is itself mimesis: of death. The subjective mind which disintegrates the spiritualization of nature masters spiritless nature only by imitating its rigidity, disintegrating itself as animistic" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 44–45; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, 75).

This passage neatly demonstrates the difference between the relative innocence of magical thinking and pathological identity thinking which can only achieve its goal if it arrests nature completely, killing it in order to know it. The cost of classification or subsumption under a concept is that nature must in its entirety be conceived of as already inanimate. Adorno and Horkheimer link this activity to the birth of modern science, which, by reducing nature to a system of facts, deprived nature of the capacity to articulate itself according to its own normative constellation.

Nonetheless, and again as a direct result of the spontaneity-receptivity thesis, the birth of modern science and enlightenment out of mimesis cannot but preserve the negativity of the particular which the need for stability of modern society's conceptual scheme seeks to deny: "It is precisely the insatiable identity principle that perpetuates antagonism by suppressing contradiction. . . . The violence of equality-mongering reproduces the contradiction it eliminates" (Adorno 1970c, 146; 1992, 142–43).

The identity principle thus represents the pathological version of the concept and of identity thinking. The identity principle's animating impulse, however, is not an inherently malicious one but is rather the survival of the subject in the face of nature. Adorno conceives of the relation between the subject and nature as empirically in disequilibrium due to the human subject's struggle to make itself at home in nature. The pathological version of identity



thinking is the result of fear which, through the process of subsumption, spreads throughout the conceptual scheme, insulating the concept against the nonidentical's proper demand to be heard as expressing its own proper organization principle.

## ADORNO'S READING OF HEGEL

In this final section I'd like to turn to Adorno's reading of Hegel which vacillates between accusing Hegel of pathological identity thinking and acknowledging that Hegel's main contribution lies in his openness to the nonidentical. The point will be to show not only that Adorno's critique of Hegel is less fundamental than his debt to him but also that Hegel's philosophy is, analyzed through the set of distinctions drawn from Adorno, more negative than contemporary receptions allow.

While Adorno is quite clear about the relation between the spontaneity-receptivity thesis and nonidentity thinking, he is rather vague on the relation in which nonidentity thinking and identity thinking stand, given their common origin in the S/R thesis. This latter relation, I suggest, can be clarified through Hegel because in Hegel we generally find a dialectical relation between nonidentity thinking (in the form of the continually appearing negative) and (non-pathological) identity thinking. Hegel's thinking provides us with an opportunity to consider both types of thinking together, first from the side of identity thinking over nonidentity thinking in Adorno's *Hegelkritik* and then from the side of nonidentity thinking over identity thinking in Adorno's Hegel appreciation or *laudatio*. The co-constitution of identity and nonidentity thinking, however, in Hegel takes its fundamental impetus from the negative or the nonidentical.<sup>22</sup>

Adorno's *Hegelkritik* comes down to the same claim made earlier against transcendental idealism in general, namely that subjectivity dominates the particular. In Hegel, Adorno thinks, this takes the form of the priority of method over the content. That is, Hegel fails to do justice to the immediate nature of the nonidentical, the "this is" when he, in the service of his general goal of expressing absolute spirit, postulates concepts which, rather than arising from the particular, are designed to fit the progression of spirit toward totality instead.

An instance of this, according to Adorno, is to be found in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which opens with the category of "being" rather than "something." The concept of Being, Adorno contends, betrays the nonidentical from the very beginning of the project.<sup>23</sup> Such failures threaten to become systematic in the sense not only that Hegel offers the wrong categories for particular instances, but that these categories, because they are removed from the

particular, obscure the force of the particular, rendering it impossible for the particular to continue to hold the concept responsible to the constellation.<sup>24</sup>

Another way to put this point is that if the dialectic turns into concepts giving rise to other concepts, as in the case of nominalism, for instance, rather than being mediated through experience, then the dialectic becomes merely a series of postulations. At times, Adorno contends, Hegel seems to know all too well where he is going. This means that the concept is no longer responsive to the nonidentical or negativity, but rather positively (i.e., predictably) related to the previous category. Adorno writes: “The thesis that the negation of a negation is something positive can only be upheld by one who presupposes positivity—as all-conceptuality—from the beginning” (Adorno 1970c, 161; 1992, 160).

This point, of course, brings to the fore another more common reading of Hegel according to which Hegel is the thinker of totality. While Adorno sometimes thinks that this is indeed Hegel’s project, Adorno also argues that the dialectical truth, as so often, lies rather in Hegel’s failure to make good on the positivity of his postulation. “If Hegel’s philosophy fails in terms of the highest criterion, its own, it thereby also proves itself true. The non-identity of the antagonistic, a non-identity it runs up against and laboriously pulls together, is the non-identity of a whole that is not the true but the untrue, the absolute opposite of justice” (Adorno 1970a, 277; 1993, 32). That is to say, even the category of categories, the absolute, is itself not immune from the dialectical critique which the nonidentical performs within it. In a sense—and this too is Adorno’s claim—it is precisely Hegel’s hubristic claim to totality which makes his thought such a good model of negativity. If Hegel’s philosophy fails in its stated goal to unite history and concept into a stable whole, it succeeds nevertheless—precisely because of Hegel’s exhaustive attempt—in revealing that negativity and positivity are negatively related.

Put in terms of the dialectic of identity thinking and nonidentity thinking, we can see that Adorno’s critique is indeed that Hegel engages in pathological identity thinking by placing his project under the aegis of the absolute. However, the deeper point is that the failure of Hegel’s identity thinking reveals that within pathological identity thinking lurks the dialectic between nonidentity thinking and (non-pathological) identity thinking related as negativity and construction. Hegel’s pursuit of pathological identity thinking thus reveals this type of thinking as a deficient mode of dialectics proper.

Adorno does not think that Hegel’s greatness lies chiefly in the dialectical failure of his project. Rather, seen in the perspective of the history of the concept, Hegel’s philosophy is the expression of negativity because Hegel is prepared to follow the particular wherever it leads. Adorno’s Hegel appreciation thus fundamentally concerns the dynamic and hence non-reified aspects of Hegel’s thought. The dynamic aspect reveals again and again the futility of

the concept's attempt to pin down nature according to the principle of identity. The beginning of Hegel's *Phenomenology* might be offered as a negation of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*. In the former, earlier work, Hegel writes that immediate certainty is "a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is" (Hegel 1968a, 63; 1977, §90). Hegel attends to the particular or nonidentical and in this way, as Adorno might put it, returns us to the origin of the original split between mimesis and enlightenment, thereby works toward the possibility of a nonidentity thinking within the context of a (non-pathological) constructive identity thinking. "The speculative Hegelian concept rescues mimesis through spirit's self-reflection: truth is not *adaequatio* but affinity, and in the decline of idealism reason's mindfulness of its mimetic nature is revealed by Hegel to be its human right" (Adorno 1970a, 285; 1993, 41).

Indeed, in returning to the particular Hegel does not simply attend to the particular but returns us to it in a way which acknowledges that the concept as subsumption is a derivative of the more primal relation which Adorno, following Benjamin, terms *Eingedenken*.<sup>25</sup> *Eingedenken*, commonly translated as remembrance, for Adorno, means to acknowledge the particular's origin as the beginning of history itself: the concept as always essentially historical in the sense of having been pulled from its organization in the constellation to be subsumed under a new conceptual schema. Hegel's acknowledgment of the history of the concept ensures, as Adorno puts it, that "dialectic has its experiential content not in the principle [that a negation of a negation is a positivity] but rather in the opposition of the other against the identity; hence its violence" (Adorno 1970c, 163; 1992, 160).

This leads us to the first central claim Adorno makes on Hegel's behalf, namely that Hegel's thought is concerned not with the synthesis of this subject-object relation as the ontological unification of two entities into one absolute subject but rather with observing the development of the normative relation between what is historically articulated as the subject-object relation against the background of the more original "how" relation of the two in the constellation. Thought is accordingly to be understood as open to the particular's contribution to what, of necessity, will then become the object. But thought's openness equally means that the category developed in service to primal need is only temporary or historical. Receptivity, we can say, is restored to its place in identity thinking.

The following passage summarizes Adorno's appreciation of Hegel:

Throughout the Hegelian synthesis is an insight into the insufficiency of that movement, into the cost of its reproduction, so to speak. As early as the Introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel comes close to a sense of the negativity of the dialectical logic he is expounding. That Introduction bids us purely observe each concept until it starts moving, until it becomes unidentical

with itself by virtue of its own meaning—in other words, of its identity. This is a commandment to analyze, not to synthesize.<sup>26</sup> (Adorno 1970c, 159; 1992, 156)

Hegel's achievement is to have understood that the only way to grasp the concept is in its proper development rather than as a fungible postulated object. Hegel attends to what gives rise to the concept and what, eventually, will cause it to be cast off as inadequate.

Hegel succeeds in this project, according to Adorno, not by remaining above the fray and refusing to take a stand but rather by engaging in conceptualization (identity thinking) in such a way that the identification of the particular with the concept and the inadequacy of this identification receive equal attention. Hegel is successful to the extent that each identification, each concept is treated as presenting genuine positivity or synthesis, and that each negativity is presented as constituting a genuine reassertion of the particular or nonidentical. This evenness in presentation, amidst the alternation of identification and its failure, is the result of the more fundamental spontaneity-receptivity relation of which both identity thinking and nonidentity thinking are species.

Adorno's reading of Hegel shows, as I've just argued, that identity thinking and nonidentity thinking mutually constitute each other.<sup>27</sup> Not only does identity thinking reveal itself as always at the core of identity thinking, but, in Hegel, we see that nonidentity thinking, the thinking of the particular, actually expresses itself in identity thinking as the constitution of subjectivity or social meaning. Hegel's thought is to be grasped as the expression of the nonidentical within the general process of the social construction of meaning. These two directions, Hegel shows, are intrinsic to each other. Hegel's thinking thus shows us that identity and nonidentity thinking cannot be separated but can only be given relatively different weight.

Hegel makes this thought explicit in a passage from the *Logic* in which he is considering the work of the concept as such: "Each side, therefore, in accordance with how it refers to the other both as identical with it and as the negative of it, becomes the opposite of itself, but, in becoming this opposite, the other, and therefore also each, *remains identical with itself*" (Hegel 1968b, 13; 2010, 510). That is, Hegel insists that the differentiation between nonidentity and identity thinking is also an identity. This identity is what I've been calling construction. Construction, however, is only intelligible if we understand it as the activity of *constructing*, that is, unifying in the face of constant negativity.

## EMBRACING HEGEL

My argument in this chapter has been concerned to develop a more precise reading of Adorno's distinction between identity thinking and nonidentity

thinking in order to emphasize Adorno's debt to Hegel rather than his rejection of Hegel. The priority of the nonidentical construed as a dialectical relation between the nonidentity thinking and identity thinking can, moreover, show us why we should embrace Hegel's project in its entirety rather than picking and choosing what seems to fit with our philosophical predilections. Embracing Hegel's project means the willingness to pursue thought itself to its most radical extent. The excesses of Hegel's system, we can now see, are not the result of a totalitarian thought—such a thought would have stopped far short of where Hegel ended up—but rather the result of a passionate pursuit of the particular wherever it manifest itself. Let me conclude by paraphrasing Adorno's assessment of psychoanalysis: "In Hegel nothing is true except the exaggerations" (Adorno 1970b, 54; 1978, 49).

## NOTES

1. This point is currently as issue in the debate around whether there can be a "non-metaphysical" reading of Hegel's political philosophy. See, for a recent discussion, the contributions by Robert Stern, Fabian Freyenhagen, and Kimberly Hutcheson in Brooks (2012).

2. I have offered a different creolization of Hegel elsewhere. In that work I seek to develop a social theory through the intersection of Hegel, Freud, and Fanon. In this chapter I develop Hegel's theory of subjectivity, a theory which my book relies on (see Bird-Pollan 2015).

3. Pippin (1989, 2008).

4. Brandom's (2002a, 2002b, 2009a) magnum opus on Hegel has yet to appear, but it has been circulating in manuscript from as *A Spirit of Trust*.

5. Other important works which roughly follow this line are Pinkard (1994a) and Stern (2002). I have offered my own interpretation of Hegel's constructivism in Bird-Pollan (2012).

6. Rawls (1999).

7. For a recent way of putting this thought as a way of forcing the issue on the largely realist analytic tradition in philosophy, see McDowell (1996).

8. Concerning Kant's influence on Adorno, see, for instance, Bernstein (2006) and O'Connor (2004).

9. See also the eponymous section of Adorno (1970c).

10. See also Kern, who argues that Adorno holds the spontaneity-receptivity thesis. Kern distinguishes this reading from the more aporetic reading proposed by Düttmann and Menke, according to which there can, in effect, not be a constructive account of human subjectivity. For Kern's position, see Kern (2006).

11. The "how" relation is, helpfully I think, put by McDowell: "When we enjoy experience conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity, not exercised *on* some supposedly prior deliverance of receptivity" (McDowell 1996, 11). On the relation between Adorno and McDowell with respect to the concept of second nature, see Testa (2007).

12. For particularly clear accounts of Adorno's critique of Kant and Hegel, see Bernstein (2006) and O'Connor (2004).

13. See Kant (1996, Bxx).

14. This is a question developed by Thein in considerable detail who argues that for Adorno, synthesis is actually pre-conceptual and as such represents a critique of subsequent conceptual development. See Thein (2013, 312–13) and *passim*.

15. For Hegel's appreciation and critique of Kant's notion of synthesis, see Hegel (1977, §231, ch. 5) and Hegel (1968a, 132).

16. Adorno compares the constellation to a work of art, the schemata, the typic, as well as to judgment itself, as we have just seen above. *Typic* is translated by Ashby as "typicality," losing the Kantian reference (Adorno 1970c, 164; 1992, 162).

17. Kant (1987, 20:213). See also Thein (2013, 327–30).

18. On this issue, see Adorno's new categorical imperative (Adorno 1970c, 358; 1992, 365). See also Freyenhagen (2013, ch. 5).

19. I leave aside Kant's derivation of the categories in the metaphysical deduction, which postulation, for the purposes of this chapter, is beside the point.

20. See, for instance, Adorno and Horkheimer (2002, 7) and Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, 23). A thoughtful meditation on mimesis, in part with reference to Adorno and Horkheimer, can be found in Taussig (1993).

21. Mimetic thinking of some sort is operative in the first three chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. There mimetic thinking is understood in terms of mere consciousness. Either the object is all there is (Self-certainty) or the subject is all there is (Perception) or an unstable alteration of the two (Force and the Understanding) (Hegel 1977).

22. I believe a similar critique of Hegel is what Rose has in mind when she writes that Adorno remained at the level of negativity, the second stage of the dialectic, and therefore refused to countenance the possibility of an identity between positivity, the first stage, and negativity, the second stage which would constitute itself in the third stage (Rose 1993, 62–63).

23. Adorno (1970c, 139; 1992, 135).

24. Adorno (1970c, 160; 1992, 157–58).

25. Benjamin (2010, 24). The term is not present in the English version of this text (Benjamin 1999).

26. See also Adorno (1970a, 362; 1993, 132).

27. For a similar view, see Guzzoni (2007), who thinks that Adorno's Hegel's thinking is true in its untruth because it reflects the social becoming of the domination of the concept over the particular. But it is also true in the sense that alongside this historical truth, it carries with it, as speculative untruth, the untruth of this historical truth. Hegel's thinking for Adorno thus projects a utopia in which the truth of the historical untruth might emerge.

## *Chapter Four*

# **Why I Am So Wise**

## *Hegelian Reflections on Whether Reason Can Be Enhanced*

Richard Dien Winfield

I, like you, inhabit this lonely planet during the brief interlude of rational animal existence, exercising my reason with a homo sapien body, residing in a modern nation, conversing in a written alphabetic language. I have framed my thoughts using pencil and pen, manual and electric typewriters, and a parade of quickly obsolescent word processors, and now I waft upon a cloud of internet connectivity as my body begins to wear out and my memory declines. Like you, I have been barraged by the assassins of reason, declaiming how my thought is limited by my species being and historical milieu, while others dangle artificial intelligence, cyborg enhancement, future evolution, genetic engineering, or encounter with more powerful extraterrestrial minds as offering escape from the enfeeblement of my conditioned rationality.

I cannot deny that my thinking depends upon contingent astrophysical conditions that allow for the evolution of intelligent life, upon a certain level of physical and psychological health, upon due upbringing in a culture within which language has developed, and upon sufficient peace and affluence to have leisure to speculate. Nonetheless, I am certain that my reason cannot be improved upon. No life form, whether it arises in galaxies far, far away or emerges on earth through future evolution or genetic engineering can possibly be more capable of thinking the truth. Nor can any machine or cyborg augmentation increase my ability to reason, nor can acquisition of a different language or cultural upbringing supply me with an improved rationality. Not even any divinity could surpass the prowess of my reasoning.

Why is my reason, and yours, so powerful that no matter how much it rests upon enabling conditions, it cannot be subject to any modification that would bring us closer to the truth?

It is easy to deflect the assault on reason that points to thought's enabling conditions and claims that they block our access to truth by rendering reason



relative to what grounds its exercise. Whether these conditions are identified as the contingent inorganic properties of our earthly abode, the particular biology that natural evolution has produced, or the linguistic conventions, mores, and power relations fostered by history, the problem is the same. Self-refutation cannot be avoided the moment these factors are held to be juridical conditions of reason, determining what we judge true, just, and beautiful.

The claim that those conditions are contingent foundations relativizing reason is undermined by its own diagnosis of the relativity of “rational” cognition. If its diagnosis is true, our reason cannot know that or anything else without qualification. If alternately we can maintain without restriction that reason has contingent juridical foundations, then that diagnosis is contradicted by our ability to know its truth, which would depend upon those conditions leaving cognition unconstrained.

If the foundations of reason are regarded to be not contingent and particular, but necessary and universal, the same dilemma arises. If they determine what reason holds true, their own truth depends upon their conferring validity upon themselves. In that case, they cease being foundations that validate something else and instead become the self-determining substance of normativity. Then, however, truth can no longer reside in what has validity conferred upon it by some other factor. Instead, reason will be valid by being autonomous, rather than through any foundation.

This outcome does not preclude reason having enabling conditions. It only shows how it makes no sense to insist that those enabling conditions can serve to distinguish between the valid and invalid thinking they equally make possible.

Nonetheless, the self-refutation of all attempts to render reason relative to physical, biological, or historical conditions does not itself establish the unconditioned prowess of my and your thinking. Even though it is impossible to know coherently that reason is juridically conditioned, this still leaves possible that our thinking is conditioned but can never verify that or anything else with unqualified authority.

To triumph over the undertakers of reason we cannot rest with exposing the incoherence of their lazy enterprise. As Hegel observed in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, any attempt to set out immediately to think without presuppositions would itself be a dogmatic enterprise (Hegel 1977, 49). To avoid making any assumptions in refuting the relativizers of reason, it is necessary to show how those who presuppose that thought always confronts the given cannot sustain their own dogmatic assumption when subject to their own self-examination. Arriving at that outcome, however, may liberate reason from the twofold dependency upon predetermined form and content, but it does not offer anything more than an indeterminate starting point, with no claims concerning subject matter or method. To establish the

power of our reason we must show how its enabling physical, biological, and cultural conditions leave thought with no other limits than those it imposes upon itself.

Let us start at the beginning, not in any temporal sense, but in respect to the structural unfolding of the reality constituting and enveloping our reasoning. The task requires proceeding from the most minimal natural conditions of inorganic nature through the development of animal life, and then onto the emergence of rationality and the historical development it makes possible, including all the possible progressions that natural evolution and technology may engender elsewhere in the universe. We will not be following the course sketched out by Plato in his *Timaeus*, where a demiurge produces from chaos a universe containing human life. The realities in question do not and cannot consist in artifacts that are the product of any manufacture, where antecedently given form is imposed upon given material. Instead, what lies at stake is the constitution of living minds, whose self-informing character cannot possibly be captured by the external combination of form and matter.

Admittedly, at each stage along the line, contingency enters in, as is unavoidable in nature as well as convention. Our reason is throughout conditioned by factors that might be otherwise. Every possibility, however, rests on some actuality and the power of our reason may well have an inherent grasp of what is actual. The mere fact that we acknowledge ourselves embarked on this investigation compels us to conceive the contingencies of nature and history such as to allow for our own rational existence.

Space, time, and matter in motion provide the minimal factors of nature to which electromagnetic phenomena add physical processes to the mechanics of inertial movement and gravitational systems. We are told by the fantasizers of contemporary physics that if the various fundamental forces of nature varied only slightly in magnitude the universe would be an empty tomb in which no matter could form and energy would dissipate into nothingness. Space and time, however, can have no determinate being apart from matter in motion, and even if the relation of forces may have an element of contingency, the accident of physical nature leaves undetermined all the various processes that may supervene upon them. Physicists may concoct their mathematical fantasies of alternate universes, just as undertaker logicians spin fairytales of possible worlds. The universe is, as such, all-inclusive and what is contingent is not any plurality of universes, but what the actualities of our one and only cosmos make possible. If “possible worlds” signify not planets that could arise within the one and only actual universe, but possible universes, then their possibility must depend upon some actuality outside of nature—a supernatural creator who generates the universe from nothing natural. In that case, “possible world” logicians must assume a transcendent creator of nature and confront the perplexity of how such an all-powerful

creator could create anything other than the best of all possible worlds. Then, of course, the world willed into being by the supreme creator is the only possible world and not at all contingent. Contingency rather pertains to what falls within the one and only universe, whose mechanisms of matter in motion and electromagnetic processes make possible the chemical reactions where differentiated materials interact, combining and breaking down into different types of substances in function of their chemical constitution. Precisely because chemical, like mechanical and physical, processes are externally caused, depending upon catalysts and the workings of other natural objects, they can be enlisted by processes of a completely different character for purposes entirely undetermined by their conditioned operations. This external determinability is what allows the self-sustaining process of life to emerge from the contingent combination of chemical reactions. They can become integrated into an “autopoietic” whole, whose semipermeable membrane absorbs and retains the chemicals whose interaction produces the starting points of a self-renewing process that not only maintains its own enclosure but also supplies the reactants, catalysts, and mechanical impulses to constitute a totality whose self-sustaining process operates as an end in itself.<sup>1</sup> Such a minimal organism will have a relatively fleeting existence unless it, once more by external accident, acquires the chemical means not just to renew itself but also to reproduce, generating another organism like itself, capable of reproducing anew. Moreover, the capacity to reproduce will further engender an evolution of species if variations in offspring arise that affect their ability to survive and reproduce. All this can take place through nothing but the contingent combination of material motions and chemical reactions that are externally caused. Whether the chemistry be carbon based or not, to the extent that it can be integrated into the self-renewing individual and species being of living organisms, it contributes to life processes that have a biological identity of their own that is common to and thereby not relative to any particular chemical realization.

Once the mechanics of matter and chemical process give rise to life, the metabolic and reproductive activity of living organisms makes possible an evolution of species through whose own contingent development the glimmerings of reason will have to emerge for our inquiry to proceed. Our lonely planet may have been the setting for a carbon-based organic world in which RNA and DNA play signal roles, but other outposts of life may have their own evolution of species with a completely different chemistry, just as earth itself may well generate life forms with different supermolecules entering into genetic development. No matter where and how life emerges, it will exhibit the sensitivity and irritability on which metabolism and reproduction depends. Every life form must be able to discriminate among the features of

its biosphere that impact upon survival and reproduction and respond in ways that further its individual and species existence.

For mind to arise, however, the evolution of species must produce organisms whose sensitivity and responsiveness ceases to be limited to the local reaction characterizing the tropisms of plant life. Instead, the contingencies of evolution must give rise to organisms whose sensitivity is centralized into a unified field of sentience, allowing the life form to perceive its environment as a unitary world, as well as perceive its own body as a unified whole. On that basis, the organism can acquire a centralized control of its irritability and respond as a unitary subject to the world it now senses in its entirety. The need for these developments of a centralized subjectivity are connected to the emergence of a metabolism that does not occur immediately, in the way that plants continuously take in water, nutrients, and sunlight directly from the environment, aided by tropic sensitivity and response. Rather, centralized sentience and bodily self-control evolves insofar as the organism cannot metabolize in such immediate fashion, but must sense at a distance the objects it needs to consume and move itself with a sufficiently enduring urge to reach and devour the nutrition it requires.<sup>2</sup> The same imperative applies to reproduction when it requires the organism to sense, desire, and move itself to accomplish the reproductive act, as well as provide whatever care its offspring may require. These defining functions of animal life bring mind into the universe, with the threefold aspects of sentience, emotion, and motility. Any development of reason depends upon these animal endowments, no matter what form they take. For this very reason, the differences in how sense organs perceive, how emotions are embodied, and how motility occurs leave undetermined the operations of thought that a rational animal could exercise.

What thinking requires is that the animal has sufficient sentience, emotive drive, and motility to engage in the psychological functions of semiotic imagination, with which animals can produce and communicate signs. These functions require intelligence, which itself depends upon consciousness and the pre-conscious psyche. Not all animal species will possess the neurophysiological resources for the psychological activities by which a pre-conscious psyche builds habits and expresses feelings so as to organize feelings and feeling activity into independent totalities. These self-modifications of the psyche engender the subject-object divide whereby mind becomes conscious by treating its mental determinations as determinations of an objectivity that it confronts.<sup>3</sup> Consciousness, however, cannot alone suffice for reason because conscious awareness always confronts its objects without at the same time being aware of the mental acts by which it does so. Linguistic intelligence, on which thought depends, must be aware at once of its own semiotic expressions and the objects to which they refer. If this cannot be done, mind can hardly engage in theorizing, which requires that reason be

aware of its own conceptual constructions and the objectivity they grasp. There may be countless animal species arising around in the universe that achieve consciousness, sensing what is, perceiving things and their properties, and understanding the dynamic relations of objects and that become self-conscious in desiring the desire of others for their own desire.<sup>4</sup> Not all, however, will have the genetic endowment permitting their minds to make the opposition of consciousness their object, opening the way for intelligence, whose intuitions, representations, and thoughts it takes to be both its own and determinations of objectivity.

Although my reason, and that of any other rational animal, must have a species being with enough neurophysiological capacity to have a self-feeling psyche, consciousness, and intelligence, this capacity does not thereby figure as a juridical foundation of thinking. What precludes this is the very character of the psychological requirements of thinking.

First of all, semiotic imagination relates an intuited content to general representations, using the former as a sign to signify a repeatable meaning that bears no connection to the content of the sign itself. Unlike symbols, whose configuration contains something that belongs to the representation it symbolizes, signs have a purely conventional, arbitrary relation to what they signify. For this reason, semiotic imagination is able to generate meanings that are not beholden to any particular intuitive content. They thereby free mind from having to depend upon imagery and allow intelligence to arrive at the threshold of thought, where imageless concepts become the material of awareness. Moreover, because what serves as a sign is determined arbitrarily by semiotic imagination, there is no limit to the production of new signs or to the semiotic imagining of new meanings. The communicability of signs may depend upon situations where intelligent animals express their signs to one another in relation to commonly observed objects and expressions. Once, however, names have emerged, signifying animals are in a position to develop communicable relations between words that allow for propositional discourse and the determination of meanings through logical relations. Of fundamental importance is that the grammar by which words enter into propositional relations is generative in character, allowing for the formulation and communication of an unlimited array of novel statements. Not only can new words always be coined in relation to new congeries of other words, but the propositions in which words figure are freely determinable. Neither the given vocabulary nor the given grammar of a language can condition what meanings and propositions its users can express. Because both naming and grammar are freely generative, language provides precisely the protean vehicle by which thought can operate freely.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, because the meanings of words and propositions can always be communicated by different verbal

expressions, discourse is inherently translatable so long as rational animals have sufficient exposure to the use of any language they encounter.

So long as a rational animal is able to make signs and engage in linguistic interaction with others, nothing about its biology and psychology can restrict what it ultimately can think. Admittedly, language competency develops both ontogenetically and culturally in stages that do limit how language users engage in discourse. Children first use words in ways that confine their meaning to imagery and the individual things to which images apply (e.g., “flower” to refer to a particular rose), and only later develop the ability to use those same names in propositions in which they obtain a logical meaning (e.g., the genus to which “flower” generally refers), defined through conceptual relations. The same development can occur in the early history of a linguistic community, whose participants are just beginning to enact and master the grammatical relations by which propositions can be formulated and communicated. Even in linguistic communities where language has a fully developed grammar, individuals may still use words in ways that restrict their meanings to nonconceptual, pictorial representations. Luria recounts how illiterate peasants in Soviet central Asia used language in this figurative way until they became formally educated and took part in the running of collective farms in which abstract policies had to be understood and fulfilled. Then they began to converse with much more logically determined meanings, without having to adopt a different language (Luria 1976, 20ff.). What this illustrates is that so long as rational animals can use language with propositional resources, they are in a position to converse with conceptually determined meanings. Then they not only may make judgments and inferences but also eventually engage in autonomous philosophical thought, which overcomes the dependence upon given premises and given algorithms that hobbles those who limit thinking to demonstrative calculation.

Philosophy must be the freest of all sciences, as Aristotle long ago recognized (1984, 1555), for unless philosophical inquiry liberates itself from all given dogma and becomes fully responsible for its form and content, the quest for truth will remain confined to labors of opinion. Hegel posed this requirement in the most radical terms, pointing out in the Introduction to his *Science of Logic* that so long as thinking begins with any given subject matter, it automatically remains doubly relative—first with respect to the particular content it addresses and second with respect to the method with which it accesses that content (1976, 43). To escape this dual bondage, philosophy must begin without confronting any given and without thereby distinguishing knowing from its object. Instead, philosophy must begin logically, overcoming the opposition of subject and object by thinking thinking, which, at the outset, has yet to determine that which constitutes both its method and subject matter. Accordingly, philosophy must start with no determinate claims about

what is or about knowing and instead proceed in a completely self-determined manner, which can only occur if philosophy begins with no given content or given method, but becomes what it determines itself to be.

Philosophy can realize the autonomy that frees it from dogmatic foundations due to a logical truth that equally vindicates philosophy's reliance upon thinking as its privileged instrument. This truth is explicitly developed by Hegel in the "Logic of the Concept," where he shows how universality, that is, the concept as such, is equivalent to self-determined determinacy (1976, 600–622). Contrary to the dogmas of the assassins of reason, concepts are not empty or rigid abstractions from given individuals. Instead, concepts are self-differentiating unities that particularize themselves into new determinations that remain at one with the universality that pervades them. Without particulars, the universal does not have its unity in diversity, and without its particulars being differentiated (that is, individual), they collapse into one, eliminating their difference from the universal and subverting the very nonempty bond of universality. Whereas given factors owe their determinacy to their contrast with one another, and determined factors derive their character from a determiner that determines something other than itself, the universal has its own defining identity only through the particularization by which it determines itself. The particulars, which, as plural, are individuals, are not given separately from the universal, nor does the universal appear in them as derivative phenomena. Instead, the particulars are constitutive elements of the universal's own constitution. Since particularity and individuality are ingredient in universality, it can be no surprise that individuality possesses its unique, nonderivative character through nothing but its own pregnant unity, whereby it is determined in and through itself, exhibiting the same concrete independence as the self-differentiating, self-determining universal. Consequently, conceptual determination is both synthetic and analytic at once, engendering new content that remains at one with the unity of the universal underway determining itself.

Conversely, self-determination itself involves universality, particularity, and individuality, as Hegel shows willing to illustrate in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right* (1991a, 37–42). To be autonomous, the self does not determine something other than itself, but instead gives itself new determination. Since this new determination is its own, the self-determining self remains at one with itself in this, its self-differentiation. Accordingly, it determines itself as universal, remaining self-identical in a particularization that provides the sphere of its encompassing unity. Since the self's determining process provides it with its defining selfhood in and through itself, it is equally individual. By contrast, all categories of essence involve some privileged factor determining some subsidiary term, where the determiner



determines not itself, but something else. This is why self-determination only arises, as Hegel documents in the transition from the Logic of Essence to the Logic of the Concept, when the relation of determiner and determined reverts to a causal reciprocity where what determines is equally determined by what it determines, leaving each term playing both roles, eliminating the distinction between determiner and determined (1976, 569–71). With this elimination, the two-tiered categories of Essence<sup>6</sup> give way to those of self-determination, where the determiner determines itself and the universal arises in its constitutive self-differentiating autonomy.

This identification of self-determination and universality secures the autonomy of thought, as well as the ability of conceptual determination to grasp objectivity. Whereas conditioned appearance is determined by some undisclosed ground, objectivity is determined in and through itself and therefore can only be grasped by a cognition that does not determine its topic externally but engages in the conceptual self-development that allows its object to unfold in its own self-constitution. This is why the autonomy of conceptual determination allows reason to think the “*Sache selbst*,” that is, objectivity in its own right, and arrive at the truth (what Hegel calls the “*Idee*”) consisting in the unity of concept and objectivity.

Consequently, because thought, as real conceptual determination, is self-determining, once sufficiently endowed animals engage in the linguistic interaction empowering them to formulate and express concepts, nothing in their enabling natural or conventional conditions can prevent their thinking from determining itself. Since autonomy may have *enabling* conditions, but not external *determining* conditions, the physiological, psychological, and linguistic instruments of discourse can in no way direct and thereby relativize the thinking they make possible. Accordingly, so long as rational animals can engage in discourse, any limit upon their thought can only be what reason imposes upon itself.

What then can terrestrial and extraterrestrial evolution, as well as genetic engineering, contribute to the life of the mind? The contingent vagaries that attend the emergence of life and its speciation through natural selection can certainly give rise to organisms with very different sense organs, motility, and neurophysiology, as well as very different metabolic rates and scales of existence. Rational animals therefore may have different kinds of sensory reception, with various degrees of acuity, different natural desires reflecting different metabolism and forms of reproduction, and different types of motor control and modes of communication. In addition, rational animals may possess different types of neurotransmission and central nervous systems of varying size and structure, allowing mental processes to operate at different speeds as well as with different capacities of recall and attention. Moreover, sexual differences reflecting diverse forms of reproduction may involve

natural urges and emotive responses that vary between different rational animal species, as well as among each one's own members.

All of these genetically determined variations can affect the content of feelings, sensations, and intuitions, as well as of figurative representations that memory recalls and imagination configures. Moreover, the differences in speed and capacity of neural processes among rational animal species can certainly impact upon computational prowess and informational command.

One might wonder why natural endowments far exceeding our own have yet to be confirmed in close encounters of the third kind. The failure of extraterrestrial intelligent life to make its presence unequivocally known to us may reflect the vast distance between planetary systems, the rarer scattering of inhabitable planets, the disparate timings of the existence of intelligent life on other worlds, and the limited lifetime of rational civilizations, whose capacity to self-destruct is all too easily triggered.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, there is every reason to suppose that somewhere sometime extraterrestrial rational animals will emerge with more powerful sensory and motor apparatuses, more capacious memories, and faster mental operations. Moreover, further evolution on our lonely planet might arrive at similar enhancements, especially if genetic engineering is allowed to steer our future species' inheritance.

These developments might well yield improved powers of empirical observation and calculation. On the other hand, artificial means might provide equal or even more enhanced perception, computational wizardry, and information retention and access than natural evolution and bioengineering could gift some lucky rational animals. Technology already offers a plenitude of sensory extenders, computing machines, and online search instruments for compensating the limitations of my natural sensibility, memory, attention, and computational abilities. Moreover, technological implants are beginning to allow me to become a veritable cyborg, internalizing the artificial augmentations that external instruments provide.

I can hardly deny that in all these ways, evolution and technology can improve upon my sensory reception, memory, powers of attention, reckoning, and information handling. Nevertheless, neither evolutionary nor technological progress can possibly enhance the conceptual self-determination in which philosophical wisdom consists.

The assassins of reason are content to follow Hobbes in reducing thought to reckoning (2000a, 110–11), but thinking is something very different from the mechanical operations of "artificial intelligence." So-called thinking machines exhibit the generic character of artifacts, so distinct from living things, let alone rational animals. Machines do not reproduce themselves, grow through a metabolism with their environment, or repair themselves. They have a design that can and must be antecedently represented by the agents who fabricate them, imposing that design upon independently given

materials. The resulting product not only does not make itself but also depends upon external agents to provide it with energy, feed it with materials to act upon, and repair it when necessary. A computing machine applies this mechanical character to information processing, where it takes in externally supplied “information” and subjects it to an external manipulation according to some formal procedure or algorithm, all according to the external necessities of efficient causality. Since such necessitation acts externally upon what it determines without regard to its particular nature, it involves the same formal, lawful determination that applies to the “empty” reasoning modeled by formal logic. Such calculative thinking involves operations that apply to externally given contents with indifference to their specific character, as exhibited in the variables of logical demonstration. The universals here at play are immobile abstractions that do not differentiate themselves and develop. As such, they are governed by the principle of noncontradiction and offer nothing but forms of consistent ordering of given contents. Accordingly, the artificial “thinking” of computing machines is a reckoning that subjects inputs to an external formal determination that is indifferent to their particular nature. This allows for quantitative prowess, but the “expert systems” that such information processing can provide only apply to what is subject to mechanistic determination. Anything specific to what is living, let alone intelligent, eludes the scope of artificial “intelligence.”

Philosophical thought is in principle beyond the realm of artificial intelligence precisely because it involves the self-determination of universality, where the self-differentiation of the universal is hardly indifferent to the particulars it pervades, but is essentially at one with them. Consequently, although computers may serve me as instruments for performing calculations and other mechanistic manipulations with unnatural speed and accuracy, it cannot augment my ability to reason. Computers may give me unheralded access to information and allow me to sort it according to formal parameters, but they can never supply the philosophical truth that consists in autonomously conceiving objectivity in its immanent self-constitution.

Although artificial intelligence may be unable to augment reason, the very autonomy of rational animals gives them a nonnatural ability to intervene upon natural evolution, both restricting natural selection by caring for the less adapted and modifying inheritance. Living organisms naturally sort themselves into species according to the biological and geographical limits that determine with what other organisms they can reproduce and share genetic materials. Rational animals, by contrast, can further modify the limits of their reproductive pool by enacting cultural norms that restrict with what other members of their own species they permit themselves to reproduce. This can give rise to subgroups sharing the same species being, as well as the same territory, but developing distinct group inheritances that may be manifest in

phenotypical features. I have happily miscegenated for decades, producing three mongrel offspring with presumably more diverse genetic backgrounds than we parents, who both come from groups that culturally restricted intermarriage and were shunned in turn by adjacent communities. Can such differences in genetic heritage among members of the same rational animal species possibly affect powers of reason? Can, for that matter, any other natural distinctions, such as sex and sexual orientation, possibly impact upon our reasoning or that of any rational animal?

It is not inconceivable that inbreeding among a subgroup of a rational animal species could lead to neurophysiological deficits that undermine intelligence or that some natural differences among members of the same rational animal species could be tied to intellectual impairments. Nonetheless, the protean character of language and the autonomy of thinking that linguistic interaction makes possible offers a guarantee of its own. Namely, any language user who can competently engage in propositional discourse wields a power of reason whose only limits are those it imposes upon itself. Whatever natural differences leave this competency unimpaired are completely irrelevant to the operations of reason and the conduct that depends upon it.

The autonomy of reason is therefore what gives rational animals an infinite character that has often been ascribed to what is divine. To the degree that reason is self-determining, how it unfolds is not subject to any external limitations. Although reason has enabling conditions, its lack of determining conditions signifies that reason is not finite in the sense of having boundaries imposed by something beyond itself. Reason, as self-determining, does give itself specifications and thereby limits itself. In so doing, however, it is *self-limiting*, which is to say, self-determining. Thereby reason exhibits the character of what Hegel duly calls the true infinite, containing within its externally unlimited process the finite as well as what lies beyond it (the nonfinite) (1976, 143–50). Both fall within autonomous reasoning since the self-differentiation of universality contains particularizations and the further determinations that supersede them in its ongoing conceptual development. From the ancients onward, philosophers have recognized this “divine” character of reason. In so doing, they acknowledge that because reason is self-determining, it needs nothing else to be what it determines itself to be and can therefore not be enhanced by anything additional. A divine reason could not do more, although, if reason and animal life go together and thinking depends upon linguistic interaction, the very possibility of an immaterial omniscient and omnipotent supreme being is questionable, to say the least.

Those who celebrate the advancing “creolization” of humanity may be duly recognizing how the autonomy of thought and conduct transcend natural differences and cultural distinctions tied to birth. If, however, they follow Nietzsche in ascribing special wisdom and right to anything particular,<sup>8</sup> they

join the assassins of reason in fleeing the universal,<sup>9</sup> as if thought were empty and concepts were immobile ghostly abstractions that cannot lay hold of anything individual, active, and objective.

You who deny the infinite power of my and our reason have only yourselves to blame, for autonomous thinking can only be limited by what it itself conceives to be the valid boundaries of truth.

## NOTES

1. See also Thompson (2007, 107–18).
2. Hans Jonas discusses these particularities of animal metabolism and their significance for the emergence of mind in his essay, “To Move and to Feel: On the Animal Soul” (2001, 97–117).
3. For detailed analysis of these developments of the pre-conscious psyche, see Winfield (2011, 120–41).
4. For an analysis of these constitutive aspects of consciousness and self-consciousness, see Winfield (2011, 145–228).
5. For further development of these points, together with a critical consideration of Chomsky’s formulation of the generative character of grammar, see Winfield (2015, 78–180).
6. From essence and illusory being, through ground and grounded, and cause and effect, every relation of essence involves a prior determiner that posits a determined determinacy. Whereas the categories of essence are determined by positing, those of self-determination arise through development, where a subject gives itself new determinacy.
7. Stanislaw Lem discusses how all these factors might underlie our failure to encounter intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. See Lem (2013, 41–76; 1987, 87–92).
8. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche explains “Why I Am So Wise,” appealing not to any dialectic of reasoning but to the “fatality” of a particular form of “healthy” life that repudiates the “decadent” embrace of universal norms characterizing the modern world (1969, 222–35).
9. See Rapp (1998) for devastating critiques, inspired by Hegel, of this post-modernist ideology.



*Part II*

**HISTORY AND AESTHETICS**





## Chapter Five

# Revisiting “Hegel and Haiti”

## *Postcolonial Readings of the Lord/Bondsman Dialectic*

Nicholas A. Germana

In her 2000 article “Hegel and Haiti,” Susan Buck-Morss reads the lord/bondsman dialectic from *Phenomenology of Spirit* with an eye to the influence that contemporary events in Haiti may have had on Hegel’s articulation of the nature of the dialectical struggle for recognition. She makes the bold claim that the philosopher’s thinking about the relationship between “master” and “slave” was directly influenced by the revolt in Saint-Domingue that was unfolding at the moment he was writing. On this reading, the Haitian revolution presents the historical embodiment of Spirit in the form of the bondsman’s newly acquired, hard-won self-consciousness. Buck-Morss’ interpretation of this famous passage from the *Phenomenology* is, however, based on a fundamentally flawed reading of the text. She continues an interpretive tradition that misreads the lord/bondsman (*Herr/Knecht*) relationship in the *Phenomenology* as a conflict between master and slave, one which she sees as a reflection of the inequities and iniquities of New World slavery. As we shall see, this interpretation is neither textually sustainable nor historically defensible. More importantly, Buck-Morss fundamentally misinterprets Hegel’s description of the necessary resolution of the life-or-death struggle between the conflicting consciousnesses that results in the creation of the lord and bondsman. In this chapter, I will explore the logic of these flawed interpretations as well as their potency as a theoretical model for understanding the relationship between colonizers and colonized. I will offer what I regard as a more textually accurate reading of the dialectic and explore an historical alternative. In particular, I will focus on Hegel’s claims about the importance of the objective realization of personhood through labor, especially through the creation of resistance movements that drive the dialectical process toward the recognition of mutual humanity.

One of the goals which I hope to achieve in this chapter has already been admirably pursued by Michael Monahan in his critique of Kelly Oliver's book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001). While acknowledging some of the strengths of Oliver's book, Monahan articulates a criticism that could just as fittingly be aimed at Buck-Morss' essay, that her interpretation "is predicated upon a very narrow, and . . . inaccurate, understanding of Hegel's own account of the phenomenon" (Monahan 2006, 389). Like Oliver, Buck-Morss errs in making what Monahan calls a "corrupted" mode of consciousness—the desire to assert one's subjectivity by "extracting" recognition from the Other—into a normative one (392). Monahan's more textually faithful interpretation juxtaposes this kind of *misrecognition* with what Hegel himself calls "pure" recognition, "the duplicating of self-consciousness in its oneness" (Monahan 2006, 390; Hegel 1977, ¶185).

The criticism I offer here of Prof. Buck-Morss' essay will follow along similar lines, but as an historian I am also particularly interested in the lineage of this misinterpretation.<sup>1</sup> This reading of the lord/bondsman passage follows from a long line of interpretations that seek to apply Hegel's ideas about the dialectics of struggle and recognition to the study of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in its myriad historical forms. This discourse has its origins in Marx's materialist critique of Hegel's formulation of the dialectic but has its more immediate basis in Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel in Paris in the 1930s, lectures that ignited post-war French Hegelianism. Kojève's Marxian/Heideggerian reading of Hegel exercised enormous influence on Sartre's existentialist reading of Hegel and subsequently on postcolonial liberation ideologies. (Simone de Beauvoir's own extraordinarily insightful reading of Hegel is much less determined by this emphasis on the necessity of conflict, but her influence on this discourse is equally significant.) In their efforts to adapt Hegel's insights to the specific dynamics of colonial and postcolonial conflict, these thinkers have advanced fruitful misreadings of the text. Frantz Fanon's reading of Hegel, influenced by the existentialist incorporation of Kojève, is the most important work in this tradition and offers a key to understanding not only the vitality of the text but also the extent to which it has been misread, misunderstood, and/or misrepresented.

I will begin with a brief overview of the problem of recognition as Hegel describes it in the *Phenomenology* and then proceed to a consideration of Buck-Morss' argument. I will then trace the history of this interpretation from Kojève to Sartre and Fanon. Finally, I will turn to a specific historical example that offers a valuable compliment and juxtaposition to Fanon's interpretation of the dialectic—Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the early 1970s.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

The dialectic of the lord and bondsman occurs in the *Phenomenology* at a particular moment in the development of human consciousness. Consciousness had previously been anchored in the world of objects, attempting to know itself through the world of things that it perceives. Having discovered, through repeated failures, that any knowledge derived from its relations with the world of objects is inadequate for self-understanding, consciousness now seeks another path toward this objective. Consciousness now looks for, and finds, its truth in itself. This "self-certainty," however, cannot be found simply within consciousness itself as a passive, static entity but in the dynamic "movement of knowing" (Hegel 1977, ¶166). The truth of self-certainty that cannot be realized through consciousness' experience of objects in the world first comes into view when one conscious agent comes into relation with another. It is in and through this relationship that consciousness becomes *self-consciousness*.

When two independent conscious agents first come into contact with one another, each of the consciousnesses strives to fully realize its freedom by demonstrating its absolute independence from the other. Dependence on the other in any way is a limitation to its own freedom.<sup>2</sup> In the struggle that ensues each of the contestants must be willing to surrender its own existence in order to deny its own contingency—its being must be proven more important than its material existence. In the struggle for the self-certainty of one's own personhood, the essential personhood of the other must be denied (Hegel 1977, ¶187). One self-consciousness emerges as the victor and proclaims its mastery over the other. The victor is the "lord" (*Herr*) and the vanquished is the "bondsman" (*Knecht*). To the lord, the bondsman is not a "person" (his personhood has been negated) but an object, and the lord can only relate to him through the material world of things in which the bondsman labors. This victory appears to the lord to have resulted in two main benefits: He acquires the labor of the bondsman, and he appears to have won the acknowledgment that was the object of his desire—recognition of his essential personhood from the Other.

The apparent victory, however, ultimately proves unsatisfactory and even self-defeating. What has the lord actually won? The apparent recognition of the bondsman is, in fact, no true recognition at all. Having been reduced to the status of a mere "thing," the bondsman lacks the personhood that is required in order to bestow recognition. Developing a line of thought first advanced by Fichte,<sup>3</sup> Hegel argues that it is precisely the failure of the lord to recognize the independence and freedom of the bondsman that deprives him of the full sense of independence and freedom he seeks. In refusing (or failing) to recognize the personhood of the Other, he denies his own personhood.

This insight is, of course, central to the Marxist, Left-Hegelian critique of capitalism and its labor relations. So too is Hegel's next argument, that the bondsman actually possesses an opportunity for self-realization through the labor that is supposed to have been the burden foisted upon him when he submitted to the lord's mastery in the first place. Productive labor provides an opportunity to fashion the world of things, to set oneself apart from it, and to realize oneself in it as the object of one's free activity (Hegel 1977, ¶196). It is the bondsman, through his self-objectification in the world through labor, who marks a historical progression in Hegel's account. The bondsman also gains an essential insight into his own being through the intimate encounter with death, an encounter that the lord never experiences. The fear of negation through death that caused the bondsman to retreat from combat is transformed through his productive activity into a positive negation of the material world on which he works, and through which he comes to objectify his self-consciousness.

It is this insistence on recognition, and especially recognition as the product of social, cultural, and historical processes, that Robert Pippin finds to be Hegel's most important contribution to our discussion of freedom (Pippin 2008). This definition of freedom has some affinity to traditional liberal views, defining it in terms of reciprocity between free subjects, but it also has an advantage: Hegel does not simply define a "free" being in abstract terms. Rather, he sees the very concept of a "free" being as a status one *achieves* (in Pippin's terms), something that is accomplished historically in societies that have developed the social and cultural conditions requisite for it: "Again, being a free rational agent consists in being recognized as one, and one can only be recognized if the other's recognition is freely given; and this effectively means only if I recognize the other as a free individual, as someone to be addressed in normative not strategic terms" (Pippin 2008, 198).

The struggle for recognition that Hegel describes in ¶¶178–96 of the *Phenomenology* takes place prior to the advent of ethical life in the state.<sup>4</sup> At this early stage in the history of Spirit in its progression toward objectification and self-realization, self-consciousness is not sufficiently developed to be able to recognize itself in the Other, nor the Other in itself. The crucial resolution of this, and the act of recognition that eventually results from this confrontation, are only possible within what Hegel calls the "ethical community" or "nation" (1977, ¶350).<sup>5</sup> The conditions for the achievement of this form of pure recognition in the modern state are most fully developed by Hegel in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821). In the more mature condition that Hegel calls "morality," the conflict of wills seeking to assert their absolute supremacy and autonomy is overcome and the objectification of consciousnesses in social customs and mores brings about the "cancellation of the single will, and therefore, in addition, just because the character

of one-sidedness vanishes, the positing of two wills and a positive bearing of each on the other" (1952, ¶112A). In its most rational historical form, according to Hegel, recognition is the basis of human freedom as it is achieved in the state in which "the universal does not prevail or achieve completion except along with particular interests and through the co-operation of particular knowing and willing" (1952, ¶260).<sup>6</sup>

### "HEGEL AND HAITI"

It is Buck-Morss' contention that the events surrounding the Haitian revolution and the establishment of an independent Haitian state *must* have influenced Hegel as he was pondering and then writing the "Lordship and Bondage" passage. If this were the case, then what we would have in the *Phenomenology* is a remarkable moment in which Hegel was recognizing the Haitian revolutionaries as free, self-conscious agents in the progress of World Spirit in the modern world, a status that scholars have always assumed would only belong to Europeans in Hegel's thinking. Buck-Morss insists: "We are left with only two alternatives. Either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe ... or Hegel knew – knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters, and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately [!] within this contemporary context" (2009, 50).

I will not dwell at length on the problematic historical grounds of this argument.<sup>7</sup> In support of her claims, Buck-Morss makes much of the fact that Hegel was a devoted reader of newspapers and other periodicals of the day (most notably Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz' *Minerva*) that described the events in Haiti. She is untroubled by the fact that Hegel does not refer to Haiti anywhere in the *Phenomenology*, noting that the text also never refers to the French Revolution, an event that scholars frequently and unproblematically read into it (Buck-Morss 2009, 50 *fn.* 83). Despite a complete lack of textual evidence, Buck-Morss concludes not only that Hegel knew about the events (a reasonable assertion) but that these events *had* to shape his thinking about the dialectic of lordship and bondage and his articulation of the dialectic in the *Phenomenology*—she allows, as in the quote above, no middle ground.<sup>8</sup> For Buck-Morss, establishing the place of Haiti in the *Phenomenology* is important to an effort to "[rescue] the idea of universal human history from the uses to which white domination has put it" (2009, 72). For the historian, however, the purely circumstantial evidence that she offers for such a connection is simply untenable.

Beyond the problems with Buck-Morss' claims about a historical connection between the Haitian revolution and the lord/bondsman dialectic, there

are a host of more strictly textual and interpretive problems. One of the first that has to be dealt with is the conflation of the terms “lord” and “bondsmen” with “master” and “slave.” Buck-Morss justifies the equivalence she draws between the two sets of terms by citing the Jena *Systementwürfe*, sketches written by Hegel both as a basis for what would become the *Phenomenology* and presumably for lectures at Jena in the first years of the 1800s. In reference to a passage from the first volume of the *Systementwürfe*, Buck-Morss writes in a footnote: “The German word normally is *Sklave*; note that here, and throughout his work, Hegel uses *both* terms, *Knecht* and *Sklave* in the dialectic of mutual recognition” (2009, 52 *fn.* 90). However, it is simply not the case that Hegel uses both of these terms “in the dialectic of mutual recognition” throughout his works. The fact that he does employ the term *Sklave* in the Jena *Systementwürfe*, while using the term *Knecht* exclusively in the “Lordship and Bondage” section of the *Phenomenology* should serve as an indication that either Hegel was discussing different relations or his thinking on the subject had somehow taken another course in a very short time. In the corresponding sections of the *Philosophy of Mind* (first published in 1817 and revised in 1830), Hegel uses *Herr* and *Knecht* predominantly, though he does also use the term *Sklave* (2007, ¶435). In this case, however, he is clearly discussing slavery in the ancient world; there is no indication that he is making any connection between slavery in this context and Atlantic slavery.

The term *Sklave* also appears in the *Encyclopedia Logic* (1991b, ¶163 A1) in a discussion of the nature of recognition, but in this instance he is contrasting slavery as it existed in the ancient world with the Christian recognition of the absolute freedom of human beings “as such.” He credits the Christian principle of freedom with the disappearance of slavery in modern Europe. In *Philosophy of Right* (1952, ¶57), he does appear to be using the terms interchangeably, but here Hegel is relegating this “false comparatively primitive, phenomenon” to the human condition prior to the establishment of Right in the state. It is not clear how this bears, if at all, on his views on modern slavery, but it does indicate that Hegel was again referring to slavery as it existed in the ancient world.

Why is this significant? The choice of terms is actually of considerable importance. By claiming that Hegel is referring to some concrete historical relationship between actual masters and slaves, Buck-Morss is missing the point that Monahan rightly emphasizes, that what Hegel is describing is a mode of consciousness—a mode of inadequate (or corrupted) consciousness that is to be overcome. As Monahan notes, “A focus on slavery [in the interpretation of this section], as such, can therefore be misleading” (2006, 392–93).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, even if one were to seek out an actual historical instantiation of this moment in the text, it would not be slavery. Andrew Cole has convincingly argued that the more appropriate historical/cultural context for



interpreting Hegel's lord/bondsman dialectic is European feudal relations (2004). Cole clearly demonstrates textually that Hegel took care to distinguish between the master/slave relationship, which he associated with the ancient world of the Greeks and Romans, and the lord/bondsman relationship that he characterizes in terms that are unmistakably associated with serfdom. (This would be the most appropriate use of the word *Knecht*, whose Middle High German origins denote a male youth, servant or vassal (Kluge 1967, 381).)

There are also fundamental problems with Buck-Morss' description of the struggle that culminates in the creation of the lord and bondsman as forms of consciousness. Describing the Haitian revolution in Hegelian terms, she writes:

Those who once acquiesced to slavery demonstrate their humanity when they are willing to risk death rather than remain subjugated. The law (the *Code Noir*!) that acknowledges them merely as "a thing" can no longer be considered binding ... In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel insists that freedom cannot be granted to slaves from above. The self-liberation of the slave is required through a "trial by death." (2009, 55)

She goes on at this point to quote from Hegel's description of the "trial by death," which I have detailed above. This interpretation is fatally flawed, however, for two reasons. First, the description of the "trial by death" in the *Phenomenology* precedes the emergence of the lord and bondsman. These statuses are the *result* of the trial by death; they do not lead to it. Hegel in no way indicates that the relationship between the lord and the bondsman will be resolved by a violent conflict, but rather, and I see this as the second fatal flaw of Buck-Morss' argument, through the labor performed by the bondsman. Through his productive activity, the bondsman objectifies his consciousness in the world and comes to recognize himself as an independent being: "It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence" (Hegel 1977, ¶195).

Finally, Prof. Buck-Morss never takes into consideration the narrative structure of the *Phenomenology* or the place of the "Lordship and Bondage" passage in it. The *Phenomenology* traces the historical evolution of Spirit through human thought, from the earliest glimmerings of consciousness to fully realized and actualized self-consciousness. The developments described by Hegel in his discussion of lordship and bondage come relatively early in this history, as pure consciousness is only just emerging into the first, immature stages of self-consciousness. If we were to try to find an historical referent for these developments (and I'm not convinced that this is a good idea), it would be, as I argued earlier, the Middle Ages. Given the necessary historical

progression of Spirit that is central to Hegel's system, the developments could not also apply to the state of Spirit's actualization in 1800.

An interesting question remains as to whether or not the *Phenomenology* should be read as a narrative of chronological progression, and the answer is very much up for debate. Monahan addresses some of the potential inadequacies of such an approach (2006, 394), and Hyppolite cautions that "the *Phenomenology* is not the history of the world, although in certain respects it is a history and is related to the history of the world" (1974, 34). One possibility, which I favor, is that Hegel was describing a progression of developmental stages of consciousness for which he sought particularly evocative metaphors.<sup>10</sup> What is clear is that each subsequent iteration of the dialectical struggle of Spirit toward self-realization builds upon and gains valuable insight from its previous failures. In the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel writes more explicitly about the stages of "mental evolution" (*Entwicklungstufen*) that can serve as the basis of a study of Mind, essentially a spiritual anthropology. Given its place in the narrative development of the *Phenomenology*, the conflict between the lord and the bondsman unquestionably occurs very early in this "evolution."

To claim, as Buck-Morss does, that "[t]he self-liberation of the slave is required through a 'trial by death'" is inherently problematic (2009, 15). Her argument gets the sequence of events wrong. The "trial by death" *precedes* and results in the modes of self-consciousness of the lord and bondsman. If the slave can only claim and proclaim his humanity by revolting against the master, in Hegelian terms we are simply regressing to the original moment of conflict that resulted in these forms of consciousness in the first place. Regression to this early stage means that self-consciousness persists in its *misrecognition* of the Other.

## THE HISTORY OF A FRUITFUL MISREADING

Buck-Morss not only acknowledges Alexandre Kojève's "brilliant rereading of Hegel's texts through Marxian glasses" (as well as the Heideggerian thrust of this Marxian reading) but also argues that like so many other white Marxists, Kojève approached slavery as an essentially premodern institution that was destined to be overcome in the progress of world history (2009, 57). In fact, it is Kojève more than any other thinker who shaped twentieth-century readings of Hegel that elevate the "corrupt" state of conflict between lord and bondsman into a normative condition. Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, delivered from 1933 to 1939, planted the seeds of French Hegelianism that would exercise such influence in the post-war years in the works of Jean Hyppolite, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

Sartre, and de Beauvoir among others (including, through Hyppolite, Michel Foucault).

The basis of self-consciousness, Kojève argues, is not "purely cognitive and passive contemplation," but desire—the desire to transform the world through action—"to overcome it in its being that is unrelated to mine and independent of me, to *negate* it in its independence, and assimilate it to myself, to make it *mine*, to absorb it in my *I*" (1969, 37–38). Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology* is anchored in Hegel's statement that "self-consciousness is *Desire* in general" (1977, ¶167),<sup>11</sup> and on this point his reading of the text is consistent with the state of self-consciousness that Hegel describes in ¶¶166–77—that is, prior to the life and death struggle that gives rise to the new forms of self-consciousness in the lord and bondsman. As Richard A. Lynch has shown, Kojève's interpretation then fatefully leaps over the intervening sections (¶¶178–84) in which Hegel describes genuine mutual recognition (Lynch 2001). The result, as Lynch argues, is a reading in which self-consciousness remains one-sided and is cast "as much more confrontational, one-dimensional, and uni-directional than in fact is the case in Hegel's story" (2001, 34).

Kojève follows Hegel's argument that it is the positive form of negation in work that allows the slave to act on his desire and actualize himself objectively in the world, thus opening the way for self-recognition (1969, 42).<sup>12</sup> He understands this work, however, in a fundamentally different way—as a preparation for a renewal of the trial by death, a contest that takes place on a higher plane of consciousness (at least for the slave). Even in his condition of servitude, the slave possesses a notion of freedom; the fact that this idea of freedom is, in fact, unactualized is the source of the slave's psychological and world-historical power. The slave's "insufficiency" stokes her desire to actualize her freedom through the "conscious and voluntary transformation of given existence, by the *active abolition of slavery*" (Kojève 1969, 49–50). Here we see a critical revision of Hegel's account. The slave, in Kojève's Marxian reading, must "impose his liberty on the Master"; he must renew the struggle against the master in order to "surmount his fear of death" and cease being a slave (1969, 50). The work in which the slave engages is, indeed, preparatory for this renewed conflict, it is the work that "one day produces a machine gun," the work that assures that this second contest will take place on a higher plane than the first and result in a different outcome (1969, 51).

Lynch is certainly correct in explaining this reading of the dialectic as a product of Kojève's commitment to Marxian revolutionary dialectical materialism (2001, 44). The other vital interpretive lens here is Heideggerian.<sup>13</sup> As Judith Butler explains, Kojève's understanding of subjectivity, and the dialectic by means of which it recognizes and actualizes itself, differs fundamentally from Hegel's: "Kojève's formulation of desire avows the

insurpassability of subjectivity; the ultimate project of desire is less a dialectical assimilation of subjectivity to the world, and the world to subjectivity, than a unilateral action upon the world in which consciousness instates itself as the generator of historical reality” (1987, 69). Kojève’s subjectivity is the factual being of Heidegger’s *Dasein*, a being inseparable from its “world.” There is no resolution of the master/slave conflict in a higher transcendent or transcendental (absolute) consciousness—simply a repetition of the struggle for freedom. Sartre’s reading of Hegel in *Being and Nothingness*, originally published in 1943, takes up and extends Kojève’s interpretation, making the Heideggerian elements more explicit.

Whether Sartre actually attended any of Kojève’s lectures or became acquainted with them through the notes of someone who had, there is no question that he was deeply influenced by the Hegelian atmosphere that the Russian émigré had created in Paris.<sup>14</sup> Sartre sees Hegel’s theory of recognition as a critical improvement (working against chronology) on Husserl’s, which Sartre criticizes as hopelessly flawed by its dependence on a transcendental ego, a hypothesis he finds “useless and disastrous” (1956, 318). “Hegel’s brilliant intuition,” he argues, “is to make me depend on the Other *in my being*” (1956, 321). On Sartre’s reading, Hegel’s theory of recognition is superior to Husserl’s because the individual self-consciousness seeking recognition is not grounded in any kind of transcendent ego but “rather its mode of being is precisely to be a question for itself.” “There can be, therefore,” he concludes, “no question of defining consciousness in terms of a transcendental ego-ology” (1956, 323).

Sartre’s critique of the model of subjectivity in Husserl directly echoes Heidegger. Consciousness cannot come to an understanding of itself through any kind of scientific or philosophical knowledge. How does the “knowing subject” get outside of itself in order to make itself an object of its own knowledge (1956, 326)?<sup>15</sup> Despite what he sees as the positive developments in Hegel’s theory of recognition, Sartre can only ultimately reject what he calls Hegel’s “ontological optimism”—the belief that “plurality can and must be surpassed toward the totality [or absolute]” (1956, 328).<sup>16</sup> No resolution or higher synthesis is possible (no *Aufhebung*): “So long as consciousnesses exist, the separation and conflict of consciousnesses will remain” (1956, 329).<sup>17</sup>

Sartre’s preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, originally published in 1961, reflects this reading of Hegel and projects it onto the liberation struggles of colonized peoples. He describes the relationship between the colonial master and the colonized subject as a dialectic, but it is clearly no longer a Hegelian dialectic. Difference is posited and reified. Conflict is all that remains—violence seems to have become an end in itself.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between European and native begins, as in Hegel, with the act of violence that establishes

the power dynamics of the dialectic. Both European and native are characterized by a limiting one-sided self-consciousness. After establishing his dominance, the European selects some natives who are to be "branded ... as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture" (Fanon 1963, 7), but the great majority are treated merely as half-animal beings who exist to be exploited for the Europeans' gain. What the European master wants is not recognition but profit (an insight gained, as we shall see, from Fanon).<sup>19</sup>

The natives' view is also one-sided, but like Kojève's slave the native is driven by a desire to transform his status, by a "stubborn refusal of the animal condition" (Fanon 1963, 17). The native struggles to assert his humanity. But how? By transforming the violence that made him into a slave in the first place. The native, Sartre argues, first misunderstands the transformative power of violence, and turns it against himself and his own: "[T]he man who raises his knife against his brother thinks that he has destroyed once and for all the detested image of their common degradation" (Fanon 1963, 18). Only by collectively turning violence against the masters in a nationalist cause can the natives realize their own humanity: "The rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity. For in the first days of the revolt you must kill: to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man; the survivor, for the first time, feels a *national* soil under his foot" (Fanon 1963, 22). As in Kojève, the native realizes his humanity by risking his life. What hope is there for the future of European relations with formerly colonized peoples? "Will we recover? Yes. For violence, like Achilles' lance, can heal the wounds it has inflicted" (Fanon 1963, 30). This, Sartre concludes, is "the end of the dialectic" (Fanon 1963, 31).

Russell Berman has provided an incisive critique of Sartre's apparent celebration of violence (1998). Berman makes a compelling argument that Sartre's "anticolonial rage is trapped from the start in a logical error within the discourse of colonialism itself" (1998, 212)—a discourse grounded in a fundamentally racist and misogynistic positing of absolute difference. Because Sartre follows Kojève's Marxian/Heideggerian reading of the lord/bondsman dialectic, he rejects the possibility of resolution that results in "pure" recognition. As Berman so powerfully states: "Drawing on a Heideggerian and, ultimately, romantic figure of absolute difference, Sartre sets non-European existence at an infinitely exoticized distance from the Western metaphysics that the colonizer presumes as normalcy" (1998, 210).<sup>20</sup> There can and will be no recognition of a common humanity—"there remain [only] a dead man, and a free man" (Fanon 1963, 31).

Exactly why Fanon approached Sartre about writing a forward to *Wretched of the Earth* is unclear. Lewis Gordon offers several possibilities, one of which is that Fanon may have hoped that bringing his work (despite and

because of the role of violence in it) together with a statement by Sartre might demonstrate some hope for the future of relations between Europeans and their former colonial subjects (2015, 131). Fanon had read Sartre and been both impressed and troubled by what he found. Chapter Five of *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in 1952, not only draws on Sartre's 1945 *Anti-Semite and Jew* but also critiques his theory of *Négritude* as "anti-racist racism" in the 1948 *Black Orpheus* (1988, 289–330). He may well have drawn inspiration from Sartre's reading of Hegel, but Gordon suggests that Simone de Beauvoir was likely a much more important (though unacknowledged) influence on Fanon's thinking about the limitations of Hegel's dialectic of recognition for a liberation philosophy (Gordon 2015, 31).<sup>21</sup>

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon's reading of the lord/bondsman dialectic clearly echoes the interpretation that we have seen handed down from Kojève: "Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him" (Fanon 1967, 216). The abolition of slavery as an institution does not remedy the situation. Recognition is not possible between the master and the former slave because liberation was granted, not won. The former slave has not ventured his life; therefore, he cannot even begin to recognize himself, let alone demand recognition from his master: "[T]he Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom, for he has not fought for it" (Fanon 1967, 221). In order to feel and make real his humanity, the former slave needs to take up arms against his oppressor, face and overcome the fear of death, and demand recognition by "impos[ing] his existence" on the master. At the end of the terrible conflict (on a field of battle "marked by the scores of Negroes hanged by their testicles") there may be, unlike in Sartre, genuine recognition—"a white man and a black man *hand in hand*" (Fanon 1967, 222).

Fanon is explicit about how his understanding of the colonizer/colonized dialectic differs fundamentally from Hegel: "I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work" (1967, 220).<sup>22</sup> In *Wretched of the Earth*, he places renewed emphasis on the "originality of the colonial context," racializing the Marxian relationship between base and superstructure. The colonized world, he argues, is a Manichean world divided into zones—the zone of the settler and that of the native. The mistake of the intellectual is to believe that these worlds can be reconciled. Fanon holds out no hope here for a Hegelian resolution: "Decolonization unifies that people by the radical decision to remove from it its heterogeneity, and by unifying it on a national, sometimes a racial basis" (Fanon 1963, 46).<sup>23</sup> In the struggle between the native and the colonizer non-violence cannot achieve the goal; by this means the native will never be able to recognize his own full humanity

because he will never experience the necessary risking of life that can liberate him from the fear of death.

Fanon consciously adapted the Hegelian dialectic, as it had developed through Marx and existentialism, to the specific material realities of colonialism. Monahan is right to note that in such conditions the corrupt state of consciousness may "better describe actual human interaction," but it nonetheless remains "only *contingently* true" when considered from the perspective of Hegel's understanding of pure recognition (2006, 393).<sup>24</sup> The life and death struggle of self-consciousnesses, and the modes of consciousness to which it gives rise, is the result of *misrecognition*. A second battle, as Kojève would have it, is not progress toward a resolution of the dialectical conflict but the (perpetual) reiteration of the refusal of recognition.

An interesting counter-example to Fanon is Steve Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness. Like Fanon, Biko adapted Hegel's dialectic to the specific material realities of the colonial context, in this case South African apartheid.<sup>25</sup> There is one critical difference between the two thinkers, as we shall see, and that is that the Black Consciousness Movement (as Biko articulated its philosophy) was not shaped by a Kojévian reading of Hegel. The result is that resolution remains the goal, a historical overcoming of the conflict between the white colonizer and the black colonial subject.

## BIKO AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

Biko saw the usefulness of Marxian analyses of the dynamics of power, but like Fanon he argued that (predominantly white) Marxists misunderstood the central role of race in the colonial and postcolonial contexts (1978, 50). To put race where it belonged, at the center of the struggle for liberation, Biko articulated a philosophy of Black Consciousness that demanded the recognition of the defining role of race. To this end he argued that South African blacks needed to organize themselves into an active resistance movement that excluded whites. The leading anti-apartheid student group in the 1960s was the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). While its white leadership was supportive of the anti-apartheid movement, Biko argued that blacks needed to forge their own identity rather than have it defined for them by the white establishment, whether pro- or anti-apartheid.<sup>26</sup> Like the bondsman, the black South African comes to know him-/herself through labor, in this case the labor of organization.

Biko and other black students broke from NUSAS and formed the South African Students' Organization (SASO). In the short paper "The Definition of Black Consciousness," written in 1971 for a SASO leadership conference, Biko argued that the critical element that was missing in the struggle



against apartheid was the positive identity of Blackness to serve as a (dialectical) counterpoint to white racism: “In terms of the Black Consciousness approach we recognize the existence of one major force in South Africa. This is White Racism. It is the one force against which all of us are pitted. . . . Its greatest ally to date has been the refusal by us to club together as blacks because we are told to do so would be racist” (1978, 50). “The overall analysis,” he continues, “based on Hegelian dialectic materialism, is as follows. That since the thesis is a white racism there can be one valid antithesis i.e. a solid black unity to counterbalance the scale” (1978, 51).

Biko did not preclude the use of violence, though he found non-violence to be a more effective strategy for the movement as long as it continued to operate publicly. Confrontation, he argued, need not lead to violence in order to achieve its goal (Woods 1991, 149). We can see clearly from the quote above about “Hegelian dialectic materialism” that Biko was likely only familiar with Hegel through Marxian sources, but his articulation of the dialectic actually more accurately reflects Hegel’s insight about recognition in the *Phenomenology*. The dialectical struggle between White Racism and Black Consciousness would result, Biko argued, in an overcoming of both forms of consciousness in a new, more mature form of consciousness: “We see a completely non-racial society. We don’t believe, for instance, in the so-called guarantees for minority rights, because guaranteeing minority rights implies the recognition of portions of the community on a race basis. We believe that in our country there shall be no minority, there shall be no majority, just the people” (1978, 149).<sup>27</sup> This goal, however elusive, is certainly in line with Hegel’s views on recognition and the possibility of an “ethical life” in which “the concept of freedom [has] developed into the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness” (Hegel 1952, ¶142).

## CONCLUSION

In his book *Continental Divide*, about the disputation between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer in Davos in 1929, Peter Gordon describes what he calls the “ramification” of ideas—the history of “philosophical concepts themselves as their meanings branch out into the wider world in which they implicitly belong” (Gordon 2010, 4). In the history of modern Western thought, there are few ideas that have undergone such frequent and consequential ramification as Hegel’s account of the dialectical struggle between lord and bondsman. One of the benefits of this approach to the history of ideas is that it frees us from the kind of conceptual oversimplification that rejects any line of interpretation as simply being wrong. Ideas have lives. As Gordon writes: “The connections and associations by which philosophical

arguments take on added significance are the fruits of argument but also imagination, and in tracing their development one tracks not necessary entailments but strategies of interpretation by which the potentialities of a given idea are developed, transformed, and revised" (2010, 4). The extent to which ideas ramify is, perhaps, an important measure of their richness (like themes and tropes in literature).

Susan Buck-Morss' interpretation of the lord/bondsman dialectic in her essay "Hegel and Haiti," problematic though it is in its use of historical and textual evidence, testifies to the richness of Hegel's concept and its ability to take on new meaning and new life. Her work stands as part of an interpretive tradition that has adapted Hegel's idea to historical and cultural conditions beyond Hegel's Prussia in 1807. Interpretive differences aside, Prof. Buck-Morss' argument stands as a valuable contribution to the larger project of creolization that this volume seeks to advance—the simultaneous enrichment of our understanding of both Hegel's metaphor and the contemporary events in Haiti (whether or not there was any actual historical connection). The primary purpose of this chapter has been to trace this line of interpretation from Alexandre Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology* through Marxian and Heideggerian lenses to existentialism. Through Sartre (and de Beauvoir), the dialectic took on new life with Fanon, who recognized the limits of Hegel's original formulation as well as its continuing significance and usefulness. Hegel's ideas were "developed, transformed, and revised" in the originality of the colonial and postcolonial context.

The philosophers Michael Monahan and Richard Lynch have argued convincingly that interpretations of the dialectic of recognition that emphasize, and even require, violence take license with Hegel's texts and, in so doing, reach conclusions that are directly at odds with Hegel's own views. Pure recognition requires struggle and even confrontation, but the key to overcoming and transcending this struggle requires that we recognize that this confrontation happens within consciousness itself and that, as Biko said, confrontation does not need to be violent.<sup>28</sup>

## NOTES

1. "Misinterpretation" is the word that I choose to use here because it is based on a misreading of the passage from the *Phenomenology* (and a conflation of it with the corresponding passage in the *Philosophy of Mind*). From the perspective of the history of ideas, however, another way to view this interpretation might be in terms of "ramification," discussed below, as Peter E. Gordon describes it (Gordon 2010, 3–4).

2. This "freedom" is, however, a fundamentally immature understanding of the idea. As will be seen below, the understanding of freedom that compels each

self-consciousness into conflict with the other is, in fact, an impediment to the realization of true human freedom in and through ethical community.

3. cf. Farr (2010).

4. As Robert R. Williams explains, “As far as Hegel is concerned such self-affirmation remains preethical; it does not leave behind the ethos of the Hobbesian state of nature” (1997, 78).

5. For a detailed analysis of the development of ethical life, see Paul Franco (1999, 188–233).

6. In Williams’ words, “Hegel shows that mutual recognition transforms subjectivity into an intersubjectivity that is compatible with the classical thesis that the whole is greater than and prior to its parts, and has as its telos a thoroughgoing reciprocal recognition that culminates in a nonparochial universal-social consciousness” (1997, 115).

7. For a more detailed critique, see Teshale Tibebu (2011, 45–50).

8. Unlike Tibebu, Sybille Fischer finds Buck-Morss’ argument “compelling indeed” (Fischer 2004, 26–27).

9. Monahan, 392–93.

10. Here is where I differ from Monahan. While he describes misrecognition as a “corrupted” form of consciousness, I would call it an “immature” form, an early stage in the development of reason, as I am inclined to read the *Phenomenology* in terms of the world-historical progression of reason. At this early stage in his career, I think Hegel had not begun to think through this development in concrete world-historical terms. This he would do in the lecture series of the 1820s, especially the lectures on the philosophy of history. I agree with Walter Kaufmann that in 1806–1807 Hegel’s inspiration was more literary (Kaufmann 1965, 108–75).

11. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 108 (§167).

12. Despite my own preference for the terms “lord” and “bondsmen,” in my discussion of the thinkers below I will use the terms that they themselves employ. In most cases these will be “master” and “slave.”

13. Rüdiger Safranski writes that Kojève “presented Hegel as he had never been known before – a Hegel almost indistinguishable from Heidegger” (1998, 344).

14. cf. Ronald E. Santoni (2003), 10–11, *fn.* 17.

15. See also Part One, Division One, Chapter Two, ¶13 of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1996).

16. Sartre, *Being and Time*, 328.

17. Sartre’s thinking on this subject evolved, and he later explored the possibility of some kind of movement beyond the limitations of this form of consciousness in the *Notebooks for an Ethics* (written in 1947–1948, but only published posthumously) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (first volume 1960). Santoni details this development in *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (2003).

18. In *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Sartre dwells on the distinction between violence and “right” (*droit*). Revolutionary violence, as an assertion of right, would be of a different nature from the violence of the oppressor (Santoni 2003, 22–23).

19. Robert Bernasconi details the important mutual influence of Fanon and Sartre on each other’s thinking in Bernasconi (2012).

20. Berman's critique goes, perhaps, a bit too far. Elsewhere, Sartre was clearly open to a transformation in consciousness after some form of "conversion" (*Notebooks for an Ethics*), but that is not evident in the preface to *Wretched of the Earth* (Santoni 2003, 20).

21. Fanon's discussion of the recognitive possibilities of "authentic love" in *BSWM* also clearly echoes de Beauvoir much more so than Sartre.

22. Even in this differentiation, however, Lou Turner argues that "Hegel has, in fact, become more indispensable to Fanon's concerns" (Turner 1996, 145).

23. Bernasconi points out the critical importance of the development of the "nation" in Fanon's thinking about the dialectical logic of colonial struggle (2012, 358).

24. Monahan, 393.

25. cf. Gibson (2011), 43–70.

26. "So many things are said so often to us, about us, and for us, but seldom by us." Cited in Mangu (2014, 316).

27. Biko (1978), 149.

28. At the outset I would like to express my immense gratitude to two former students whose interests and research on Hegel have pushed my own work in new directions. In 2010, Steven Gonzalez first asked me about Hegel's familiarity with the Haitian revolution and whether it could have influenced him as he was writing the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This was the first time I encountered this question, which Steven and I then pursued in an independent study. Without him, this is a path I would likely not have gone down. In 2013, Alexander Habibi brought Biko's assimilation of Hegel to my attention. My thinking has been significantly shaped by Alexander's insights and the work he did on this subject, culminating in the paper "Steve Biko: The Intellectual Roots of South African Black Consciousness" (Habibi 2014).



## Chapter Six

# Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History

## *The Dialectics of Species-Life*

Karen Ng

There is a well-known saying by Audre Lorde that has become something of a mantra for feminist and progressive thinkers: “*For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (1984, 112).<sup>1</sup> Lorde’s argument draws on a familiar distinction that potentially arises in almost every debate concerning social and political change, that between reform and what we could call radical or revolutionary transformation. Using the master’s tools—the language, the categories, the social structures, the cultural products—may help with respect to small, consiliatory gestures of reform that address local or short-term problems, but genuine social and political change requires us to employ new tools, new language, and new categories in order to construct entirely new practices and institutions altogether. There is, so to speak, no repurposing of the tools of oppression toward non-oppressive ends. Slavery, Jim Crow, colonialism, and laws that excluded women from public life did not need to be reformed; rather, such practices and institutions needed to be abolished entirely, representing moments of utter failure and injustice in the course of human history.

There is perhaps no other philosopher who better represents the “master’s tools”—particularly when taken in a distinctively theoretical sense—than Hegel, who placed himself at the triumphant end of history’s long march toward freedom, and there is certainly no theory more vilified than his unabashedly Eurocentric philosophy of history. Nonetheless, the aim of this chapter is to explore whether or not we can still learn something from Hegel with respect to historical self-consciousness and universal freedom, and I will suggest that the idea of universal history can still, particularly in a negative mode, be put toward progressive or emancipatory aims.<sup>2</sup> Despite Lorde’s undoubtedly well-founded pronouncement, there are two reasons

that we can cite here at the outset in order to prevent Hegel's decidedly controversial philosophy of history from prematurely falling into the rubbish heap of dated philosophical ideas. First, it is not clear that the distinction between reform and revolutionary transformation is a clear-cut one. Certain reforms can eventually lead to large-scale structural changes, and what may appear to be more radical, structural changes can revert to former modes of domination that were presumed overcome, sometimes in more insidious ways. In an effort to overcome the apparent dichotomy between these strategies toward social change, Nancy Fraser has suggested the idea of "non-reformist reform," which challenges the thought that these strategies are mutually exclusive (2003, 78).<sup>3</sup> Second, and once this distinction is rejected, it is no longer immediately obvious why the master's tools cannot, in principle, dismantle the master's house. If we take the metaphor literally, a set of tools can of course be used to build and dismantle a whole host of disparate things; taking the metaphor less literally, we might say that in the twentieth century, Hegel's philosophy has been employed quite effectively to challenge both patriarchy (in the work of Simone de Beauvoir) and race-based colonial practices (in the work of Frantz Fanon), suggesting that the master's tools can indeed be repurposed toward emancipatory aims (de Beauvoir 2011; Fanon 2008).<sup>4</sup> More recently, Alison Stone has argued that the Enlightenment virtues of clarity and rational argument, despite their gendered historical meanings, which largely excluded women from their purview, are nonetheless important resources for feminist critique (2015). My contention then is that there is nothing in principle within Hegel's philosophy of history that renders it disposable, despite its clearly belonging, in a certain sense, to the category of the master's tools.<sup>5</sup>

In what follows, I will take up Hegel's philosophy of history by defending what I will call, following Adorno, negative universal history (2006, 89–98).<sup>6</sup> Adorno suggests that the concept of universal history must be "understood dialectically" and that we must "think of the concept of universality as *negativity*" (2006, 14 and 18). Although Adorno positions his own views on history explicitly against Hegel, and, specifically, Hegelian conceptions of progress in world history, they share two important critical frameworks in common that are often overlooked. The first is a form of critical naturalism that Adorno discusses under the heading of "natural history" (1984, 1973, 300–360);<sup>7</sup> the second is an understanding of the relation between the particular and the universal in terms of negativity (2006, 10–18; 1973, 313–14).<sup>8</sup> Thus, although they are often viewed as philosophical foes, no one appropriates the master's tools better than Adorno, and I will argue that Hegel and Adorno's philosophies of history can, in certain ways, be viewed as complementary rather than as fundamentally opposed.<sup>9</sup> In reading Hegel and Adorno on history together, I aim to show that they can provide an instructive philosophical account of



emancipatory historical transformation, one that can serve as the theoretical justification for familiar first-order normative claims made on behalf of “the human.” From Hegel’s conception of history as the consciousness of human freedom, to Marx’s call for a distinctively human emancipation in the face of colluding state and market forces of exploitation and dehumanization, to Fanon’s call for the creation of a new humanity in face of colonial domination, and finally to contemporary battles fought under the banner of human rights, it is clear that the concept of a universal humanity forging the at once continuous and discontinuous path of universal history has significant normative force in the process of articulating both moral and political demands.<sup>10</sup> However, what remains entirely unclear is whether or not such a concept of humanity or the human species makes philosophical sense, and whether and how such a concept could be consistently defended on theoretical grounds. In formulating a conception of negative universal history, this chapter aims to provide such a defense.

I will begin by presenting an account of the concept of species-life that is at the heart of any concept of universal history, and consider some arguments in Kant, Hegel, and Michael Thompson that allow us to refer meaningfully to the concept of the human species and its potential progress (first section). What will become clear in this discussion is that the species is a presupposition for making sense of particular human instances and that species-concepts in the relevant sense are both inherently circular and weakly normative. With species-talk secured, I will then determine two specific senses of negativity that are inherent to the species-life of human beings: the first concerns what Adorno calls natural history and the second concerns the relation between the universal and the particular (second section). From the senses of negativity developed above, I will suggest that negative universal history can be viewed as the consciousness of freedom that proceeds from one to some to all (a Hegelian formulation), suggesting that it is in the struggle between freedom for some and freedom for all, rather than in the logic of sacrifice for which Hegel is often criticized, that the critical force of his argument can be best assessed. Finally, using the theoretical resources developed in this chapter, I turn to a brief assessment of how the concept of the human species is employed in Fanon’s normative project in *The Wretched of the Earth* and Lynn Hunt’s account of history of the development of human rights (third section). My suggestion is that the circularity of their respective employments of the concept of the human species is defensible, provided that we accept the notion of negative universal history defended here. The aim of this chapter then is to understand why universal history must be at once “constructed and denied” as Adorno claims, or again, why the historicism of European political modernity is both “indispensable and inadequate” as suggested by Chakrabarty—in short, to assess why, according to Buck-Morss,

“universal history matters” (Adorno 1973, 320; Chakrabarty 2000, 6; Buck-Morss 2009, 79).<sup>11</sup>

## UNIVERSAL HISTORY AND SPECIES-LIFE

In its original formulation, universal history brought concreteness to the a priori forms of intuitions espoused by Kant in the first *Critique*, rendering the scope of space and time universal not just transcendently but in actuality. At the level of time, universal history covers not a specific time period but cuts across “an incalculable series of generations” and potentially spans the entire developmental history of the human species (Kant 1991, 43). At the level of space, universal history cuts across borders and spans the entire globe, aiming at a cosmopolitan society encompassing all human beings. Underlying this universal scope of space and time is the idea of human beings who develop and progress *only* as a species. Kant’s initial claim appears to be something like the following: to speak of historical development at all requires that one formulates some conception of human beings as a universal species, where the notion of individual progress, taken in isolation, is an incomplete and perhaps even incoherent idea. Individual development can only be understood within the context of the development of the human species as a whole, not only because such development takes place as a process of trial and error in relation to others but further because learning takes place across generations such that individual progress is measured in relation to past and projected future generations. We might say that, for Kant, the idea of the species is a necessary condition or presupposition for the possibility of speaking of development at all. However, despite acknowledging a certain conceptual and even moral necessity for articulating the idea of the human species, it is important to note that he is not entirely optimistic, either concerning the possibility of clearly articulating such an idea or concerning the prospects of humanity itself. Concerning the former, Kant expresses his doubts by noting that experience provides us with no basis for comparison, insofar as we have yet to encounter a non-earthly rational species against which we might be able to measure our own (2006, 225). Concerning the latter, he simply states the following: “If one now asks whether the human species . . . is to be regarded as a good or bad race, then I must confess that there is not much to boast about in it” (2006, 237).

Eschewing Kant’s epistemological and normative modesty, Hegel suggests that universal history is the history of world spirit, a term of art that has the reputation of being indeterminate at best and obscuring and ideological at its worst. Nonetheless, a case can be made that Hegel’s concept of spirit or *Geist*—what he famously calls in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the I that is

We and the We that is I—provides us with one of the most important accounts of how we might articulate a sense of the human community that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.<sup>12</sup> To avoid any misunderstandings in which “spirit” is understood as a world soul or cosmic mind, Hegel frames his discussion of historical development in terms of human freedom, and more specifically “the progress of the consciousness of freedom” (2011, 88). With respect to this consciousness of freedom, he further suggests that “[t]he spirit of a people [*Volksgeist*] exists as a species [*Gattung*], as universal for itself [*für sich*]” (2011, 161).<sup>13</sup> Everything hinges, then, on whether and how we can grasp the concept of the human species—what does it mean to take ourselves as a species to understand *Geist* as a universal *Gattung*?

At the most basic level, *Geist* is a species in the same way that every other life form lives and dies as a species: individuals relate to the whole as a member or a part; the activities that reproduce both the individual and the species are carried out in relation to the species as a whole; survival and flourishing depend upon relationships with other members of its species, as well as exchanges with other species and the surrounding environment. Species-life constitutes a self-organizing, self-sufficient totality insofar as the ends a species pursues, as well as the means by which it pursues them, are fully determined by the species itself through nothing but its own ongoing activities. All biological species live and die according to their own, immanently determined standards (what Aristotle called “a principle in the thing itself”), standards that govern the totality of meaningful activity within the species as a whole. The most obvious way in which *Geist* as a species is distinct from other nonhuman species lies in the fact that the immanent standards governing meaningful activity are determined *self-consciously* through individual and collective acts of thinking and willing. This is what Hegel means by suggesting that *Geist* is a species that is universal “for-itself”: in reflexively relating to itself *as* a species, in actively defining the rules, standards, and practices by which species-life is organized (e.g., how we reproduce, how we acquire food, how we rear the young, how we care for the dead), our activities are mediated through and through by our very awareness of ourselves *qua* species. This consciousness of itself as a universal species is the distinguishing feature of human freedom, and it is only within the context of this species self-consciousness that the concept of historical progress gets a foothold.

Hegel distills the concept of progress by contrasting the character of change or alteration (*Veränderung*) in nature and spirit. In the forms of both nature and spirit, Hegel suggests that “everything is transitory” and that everything undergoes “persistent change” (2011, 155). In nature, however, we could say that the more things change, the more they stay the same; Hegel writes: “So the planets move from place to place but the orbit persists; and it is the same with animal species. Alteration here is cyclical, constant repetition

of the same. Nothing new is produced by all the changes in nature; this is why nature is tedious” (2011, 155). It is possible that Hegel overstates his case here, perhaps for dramatic effect in the context of his lecture. However, his point is that at the level of classes and species (*Gattungen*), or at the level of the *universal*, the level of the immanent principle of particular species, the constant activity of nature is more cyclical rather than properly transformative. Note that a similar observation is made by Rousseau: “an animal is at the end of several months what it will be for the rest of its life, and its species is after a thousand years what it was in the first year of those thousand” (1997, 141).<sup>14</sup> It is not that nature does not develop as such, for Hegel is clear that nonhuman living species develop according to their own inner principles and further are subject to external forces that may change the course of such developments (e.g., forced migrations, extinctions, and diseases). What allows us to refer to the changes and transformations of spirit as *progress* as opposed to blind development is spirit’s capacity to take its own development as an object of consciously directed activity. Thus, changes within the species of *Geist* can be referred to as progress only insofar as they are “mediated by consciousness and will” (Hegel 2011, 109). In contrast to the changes experienced by other species, *Geist* can, while remaining subject to external forces, self-consciously direct its own development.

It is important to note that in referring to *Geist* as a species, Hegel does not mean to refer to the sum total of human beings existing at any given time. Rather, and stemming from the distinctive awareness of ourselves *as* a species, the claim here is primarily conceptual, suggesting that the very act of determining the human-species concept is itself an act of freedom, and part of the historical process through which consciousness of freedom is actualized. Thus, far from referring to a quantifiable aggregate of individual human beings, the community referred to by *Geist* is a thick concept that refers to the ethical human community of the living and the dead.<sup>15</sup> There are (for our purposes) two potential ways in which we might employ the concept of species in the context of considering universal history. The first is a roughly Kantian approach: on the one hand, we could say that a concept of the species is *presupposed* whenever we make certain kinds of judgments concerning members of the human race. These judgments would fall under the general heading of what Kant calls reflective judgments, judgments in which we ascend from the particular to the universal, particularly when no appropriate pre-given universals are already available to us. Just as the principle of the purposiveness of nature (a certain order of nature that makes it amenable to human judgment and action) is presupposed when we judge an object to be beautiful or an object to be alive, we presuppose *a priori* a concept of the human species whenever we make judgments concerning the degree of reason, freedom, or progress (and the lack thereof) of a particular human instance. On the other

hand, we likewise *project* a concept of the human species as an ideal that we strive to approximate, however unachievable such an ideal might be in actuality. This is the function of the idea of the species as a cosmopolitan society in Kant's philosophy of history.

Although this approach certainly has its appeal, there are two reasons why it will be rejected here. The first is that such a conception presents the species as both overly fixed and idealized, rather than as a dynamic, reflexive, and historically developing concept that itself transforms significantly over time and place. As a strictly transcendental concept, it appears to operate independently of human direction and construction and serves instead as the very condition for particular kinds of human judgments and doings. Although this is not necessarily a problem if one stays within the confines of Kant's own system, its transcendentalism along with its strong teleology is difficult to defend insofar as one is committed to a thoroughly historicized approach to species self-consciousness.<sup>16</sup> The second and perhaps more important reason that this approach will be rejected here is a worry that the universal concept of the species at once presupposed and projected by Kant as an ideal is in fact a highly parochial and particular (read: European Enlightenment) conception of the species operating under the guise of universality. It is a false universal and not in fact universal at all, serving an imperialistic function that is disastrous both politically and philosophically, passing over into ideology. My contention in the next section will be that despite its shortcomings, Hegel's conception of *Geist* as a universal species, which I will interpret in a negative sense, does not fall prey to the charges leveled here at Kant.

A second option for articulating the concept of the species has been put forward by Michael Thompson, one that is more helpful and appropriate for our purposes here. In the first part of his book, *Life and Action*, Thompson argues that we necessarily refer to a "wider context" or species concept whenever we make judgments concerning living things and develops an account of this kind of judging under the heading of "natural-historical judgments" (2008). The notion of the life-form or species is introduced by way of an analogy (Thompson 2008, 58)<sup>17</sup>: a baseball game, for example, is composed of a variety of actions such as throwing a ball, running, catching, and hitting a ball with a wooden stick, all of which can be understood as actions independent of the context of a baseball game. Nonetheless, there is no possible way to describe a person as stealing a base, hitting a home run, striking out, and so forth, *without* presupposing a rule-governed practice that we call "baseball." The implication, further, is that "[t]he practice is prior to particular cases: unless there is the practice, the terms referring to actions specified by it lack sense" (Rawls in Thompson 2008, 58). Thompson's contention is that the life-form or species concept functions in an analogous way: when we make judgments concerning the particular activities or characteristics of

living things (whether they are jellyfish, bobcats, or humans), we presuppose the wider context of a life-form through which these particular cases acquire their meaning. Just as hitting a grand slam only makes sense by reference to the wider context of baseball, we might say that particular instances such as hunting in a pack, breeding in the spring, or using the tinder app presuppose a life-form or species concept through which the meaning of particular instances are determined.

Having laid out this general way of how we might refer to the concept of a species, Thompson makes the case for two additional characteristics of natural-historical judgments. The first is that what we refer to as the life-form is not simply a statistical generalization of information that we have regarding particular instances. If this were the case, the simple judgment that “acorns become oak trees” appears to look like an anomaly or accident rather than telling us something important and essential about the life-form of oaks.<sup>18</sup> For Thompson, natural-historical judgments are weakly normative in the sense that they tell us how a particular case ought to be or is supposed to be, relative to a life-form concept.<sup>19</sup> This is not unlike what Kant suggests is characteristic of teleological judgments, which “compares what a natural product is with what it is *meant to be* [sein soll]” (Kant 1987, 429).<sup>20</sup> Thompson also adds that there is a necessary connection and reciprocity between the particular instance and the life-form such that any judgment of defect counts as “immanent critique”; in his own words, “[a] reference to the life-form is *already contained* in the thought of the individual and its vicissitudes” (2008, 81).<sup>21</sup> Second, Thompson argues that natural-historical judgments constitute a distinctive *type* of judgment, irreducible to standard-form categorical propositions. This leads him to suggest that there is an irreducibility to this very form of thought, that when we think of living nature and human beings, we are operating with a distinctive type of thinking that requires us refer to the wider context of something’s natural history, one that carries some normative weight.

Thompson’s highly original account of natural-historical judgments allows us to see how it is that Hegel can refer meaningfully to *Geist* as a species and how we might understand the human species in terms of a universal natural history. If Thompson is right, then any judgment we make about a particular human being, a particular practice, a particular institution, or a particular society refers to the wider context of the human species, a species concept that is neither transcendental nor fixed, but continually rearticulated in the very activity of forming natural historical judgments about ourselves—including the writing of universal histories, particularly in the negative mode of what Thompson calls immanent critique. We can also begin to see why it is that Hegel frames human history in terms of the consciousness of freedom: insofar as human beings are, as far as we know, the only species who forms

natural-historical judgments about itself, consciousness of freedom becomes the only consistently reflexive way of ensuring that our judgments about ourselves and the attendant wider context is one that can account for the very act of our continually forming such judgments with respect to our own life-form. More straightforwardly, Hegel contends that universal consciousness of human freedom comes to be the unavoidable species-concept that we refer to whenever we make more local judgments concerning particular human instances, and it is the irreducibility of this line of thought that I want to explore in the rest of the chapter.

## TWO SENSES OF NEGATIVITY IN NEGATIVE UNIVERSAL HISTORY

With the possibility of meaningfully referring to the human species secured, we can now turn more directly to what it could mean to do universal history in a negative mode. Not unlike the concept of *Geist*, negativity or “the negative” plays an indispensable role in both Hegel and Adorno’s philosophies and is likewise often both indeterminate and obscure. For Hegel, the meaning of negativity stems from his amalgamation of Spinoza and Fichte. Hegel takes on Spinoza’s *omnis determinatio est negatio* (“every determination is negation”—a creative misquote of Spinoza)<sup>22</sup> in order to suggest that determinacy takes place by means of negation; in its simplest terms, the thought is that any determinate grasp of a concept or an object depends upon its standing in contrastive relations to other concepts and objects, that it is through the very process of articulating these contrastive relations that concepts and objects acquire their meaning.<sup>23</sup> To take just one example, we could say that the concept of freedom acquires its determinacy and content in virtue of the very process of understanding it in contrast with, or as the “negative” of, instances of unfreedom and domination. There is clearly a circularity to this way of operating, but Hegel’s entire philosophical system can be read as an attempt to demonstrate that this is a non-vicious circularity and that in fact affirming this kind of circularity is an essential part of understanding human freedom as historically emergent (we can also note that it is circular in the same way that the relation between natural historical judgments and the species-concept it refers to is circular; another way of thinking about the necessity of this kind of circularity is a commitment to avoiding foundationalism of any kind). This allows us to see why it is that Hegel begins the journey of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* by presenting us with an archetypal form of domination—the master/slave relation. Far from being a “state of nature” style of argument, Hegel’s method here is an instance of his commitment to the negative: to understand what we mean by freedom (surely the



task of the *Phenomenology* as a whole), we need to first understand the form of one of the most prevalent historical manifestations of *unfreedom*: that of slavery, serfdom, and servitude.<sup>24</sup>

The Fichtean part of Hegel's equation consists in a meta-move in which the theory of determination as negation is reflexively applied to the self: just as concepts and objects are determined by standing in contrastive relations to what they are *not*, the self likewise comes to gradually determine itself by setting itself in opposition and relation to what is *not* the self, beginning with the external world and other self-negating selves. In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel calls this "the tremendous power of the negative," claiming that *Geist* is this very power that looks "the negative in the face and linger[s] with it" (1977, ¶32). We can think of negativity both as the power of spirit to determine its own concept of itself and as the very power of opposition that it faces in that very process of self-determination.<sup>25</sup> This opposition can take a variety of forms: the opposition posed by concrete objects, the opposition posed by nature, the opposition posed by other self-negating selves (this includes, for Hegel, both humans and nonhuman animal life), and even the opposition posed by contradictory concepts and self-conceptions put forward by spirit itself.

Adorno presents his own version of this thought by arguing for what he terms the "nonidentical." What the nonidentical attempts to capture is not simply opposition, but the dependency of all our conceptions and self-conceptions on a necessary moment of *nonconceptuality*, one that is independent of, and exceeds, all of our attempts to conceive it. Far from being an obscurantist claim, Adorno's point is a materialist one: if what something *is* is determined by standing in contrastive relations to what it is *not*, then concepts (including concepts of ourselves as a species) must be dependent on something *nonconceptual* for their meaning and content. Although there is no pure, unmediated access to the nonconceptual as such (and this is what prevents Adorno from falling into some version of the myth of the given), the nonconceptual nonetheless enjoys a priority over the conceptual in the following sense: concepts depend upon the nonconceptual for their content and truth but the nonconceptual is not exhausted by the concept that tries to capture it.<sup>26</sup> The nonconceptual materiality to which concepts are indexed contain the possibility of resisting and opposing the very concepts that refer to them. This is one way of understanding Marx's reference to the "suffering humanity that thinks" (2000, 43): the somatic and psychic suffering of human beings is "nonidentical" to the concept of the self-conscious human being who thinks, and this nonidentity becomes the potential site for transforming both our concepts and their nonconceptual material conditions at once. In short, what Marx calls the "suffering humanity that thinks" must be seen as a certain kind of "defect" when viewed in light of wider context of the human life-form.

In light of this, how then, can we conceive of *negative* universal history? Although it is clear that negativity can potentially take an infinite variety of forms, both Hegel and Adorno identify two paradigmatic modes of opposition in universal history: the opposition between history and nature and the opposition between the universal and the particular. We can first consider the relation between history and nature. Returning to Hegel's claims concerning how *Geist* as a species progresses in contrast with changes in nonhuman nature, we can see that Hegel is committed to the thought that our understanding of ourselves as a species can only be determined insofar as we grasp our identity and nonidentity with other natural species. This relation (what Hegel would call a "speculative identity") is irreducible, insofar as *Geist* is both fully natural and fully spiritual.<sup>27</sup> The necessity of living as a species always serves the dual functions of survival as well as flourishing, the satisfaction of physical as well as spiritual needs, and species-life is simply the mode or medium in which all living things subsist.<sup>28</sup> We can also think here of Adorno's enigmatic statement that the "antithesis of nature and history is both true and false" (2006, 122): species-life is a necessity of nature as much as it is a historical product borne out of freedom, and it is in forgetting the dialectical character of this relation, the negativity of this relation, that *Geist* as a totality becomes ideology. We could say that the history of the human species for Hegel is always a natural history, and even while the actual is rational, it is equally the case that "actuality first exists only as nature" (Hegel 2011, 93). Hegel thus entirely agrees with Adorno that "[t]he interweaving of nature and history must in general be the model for every interpretative procedure in philosophy" (Adorno 2006, 133).<sup>29</sup> Universal history in a negative sense thus determines both the ends (*Zwecke*) and the progress of the human species always in relation to its status as both thoroughly natural and thoroughly spiritual.

In thinking of ourselves in terms of natural history and natural historical judgments, and attending to the negativity that holds between nature and *Geist*, Adorno contends not only that this interpretive procedure is critical but, further, that it prevents us from "lapsing into pure randomness" (2006, 133). It is clear why the procedure is critical: on the one hand, it provides us with a procedure for understanding historical development both as something that emerges from nature and as a process that has subjected nature (and ultimately ourselves) to increasing human domination and control; on the other hand, it also provides us with a procedure for understanding nature as thoroughly mediated by history, preventing us from viewing what is socially and historically mediated as something that exists of necessity by nature. We can call the former "the dialectic of enlightenment thesis" and the latter "the de-reification thesis." Both approaches have to be held together so that neither nature nor history disappears from view in our natural-historical judgments

about ourselves (and whatever its shortcomings, it's clear that this is at least in line with Kant's original intentions in formulating a universal history: to articulate a concept of the human species according to both the laws of nature and the laws of freedom).

The second sense of negativity at work in the progression of *Geist* as a species concerns the opposition between the particular and the universal, the infamous slaughterbench of history along with the often-criticized logic of sacrifice at work in the development of world history. Two short passages in which Hegel speaks of the negative in relation to the universal species helps to illuminate the problem more clearly:

Nature itself does not know itself; its concept does not enter as such into phenomenal form; nature does not comprehend itself, and consequently the *negative aspect of its configurations is not apparent for it.* (Hegel 2011, 156; emphasis mine)

The spirit of a people exists as a *Gattung*, as universal for itself, and therein resides the possibility that the universal can appear within this people as what is posited over against it. Thus the spirit of a people allows its negative to make an appearance ... spirit as spirit prepares its own downfall, which is however the coming forth of a new life. (Hegel 2011, 161)

The conscious development that Hegel calls "progress" is figured here entirely in the negative: it is only insofar as *Geist* is a species that knows itself as a species that the negative becomes apparent for us, that the negative makes an appearance and potentially becomes an object of further acts of thinking and willing. Negativity is inherent to the self-conscious development of *Geist*, and Hegel claims that spirit is "opposed to itself," "in a hard and ceaseless conflict with itself," making spiritual development a "hard and obstinate labor" (2011, 109). The negative here denotes a constellation of problems surrounding the opposition between the particular and the universal species or society, an opposition that is likewise key to Adorno's reading of universal history.

The most well-known aspect of this opposition is the sacrifice of the particular to the universal, what Horkheimer called the "naked senselessness" of the death and suffering of individuals, the senseless sacrifice of "the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals" in the slaughterhouse of history (Horkheimer 1995, 5; Hegel 2011, 90). Although Hegel is frequently criticized for this aspect of his philosophy of history (including by Adorno himself), Adorno is also most astute in his reading of Hegel here, conceding, in a certain sense, that "Hegel simply has the more powerful argument" (Adorno 2006, 47). To understand what Adorno is referring to by Hegel's more powerful argument, we can begin by noting two things regarding the relation between particulars and the universal. First,

in the famous slaughterhouse passage, Hegel's position is fundamentally ambivalent, and not only refers to these sacrifices as "monstrous" but further poses the entire problem in the form of a melancholy question, expressing both moral sorrow and incredulity at the thought that there could be a final purpose to such a frightful spectacle (2011, 90).<sup>30</sup> Far from being sanguine about these misfortunes and sacrifices as means toward a greater end, Hegel wants to emphasize that whatever reason we discern in world history must be coupled by an awareness not only of the fundamentally ambivalent character of historical transformation but further that there can be no *moral* justification for the losses incurred, even when with the power of hindsight we may want to affirm, to a degree, the transformation in question.<sup>31</sup> Thus, history marches on—for better *and* for worse, and in different ways—but the losses are irredeemable.

This brings us to a related, second point: in his account of historical transformation, Hegel absolutely affirms that there is a need for individuals to be satisfied in their particular interests, desires, and passions as they carry out their ends. The pursuit of these particular interests is both the *impetus* of all action to begin with, and brings with it the necessary possibility of evil insofar as individuals cannot eliminate the element of particularity that almost inevitably places their selfish ends at odds with the universal. But here again, Hegel is appropriately ambivalent, for he suggests that although, from a certain perspective, individuals can appear as mere *means* toward historical progress, from another perspective human beings are fundamentally *ends in themselves*. He writes:

But although we may accept that individual persons, their purposes and the satisfaction of their purposes, are sacrificed, that their entire happiness is given up to the realm of natural forces and to the contingency of which it is a part—that we view individuals in general under the category of means—there still remains one aspect of individuals that we hesitate to view only in this light, even in the face of extremes, for it is something *utterly not subordinate* [my emphasis] but rather is in itself eternal and divine. . . . Human beings are ends in themselves not only in a formal sense, as are all living beings—see Kant— . . . individual human beings are also *ends in themselves* by virtue of what their ends involve. (Hegel 2011, 96–97)

For Hegel, like Kant, human beings are ends in themselves, which suggests not only that there is no moral justification for their sacrifice but further that each human being is fundamentally non-substitutable in her or his moral worth. Hegel in fact takes this thought even further than Kant, suggesting that there is an "infinite right of the subject" for individuals to be satisfied in pursuing their particular interests, interests that include the pursuit of individual "needs and volitions but also one's own insights and convictions"

(2011, 91–92). This is what makes Hegel’s account of species-life and historical transformation fundamentally modern: the universal *all* of the species is not an abstraction from individuals but refers equally to *each* individual who is not simply an organ but a *participant* of the species. Thus, when Hegel claims that “*all* human beings are intrinsically free, that the *human being* as *human* is free,” this equally means that *each* human being is supposed to be free (2011, 88). Our failures in the realization of this ultimate end appear as the monstrous sacrificial slaughterbench in which individuals are reduced to means, one that can have no moral justification.<sup>32</sup>

With this in mind, we can now consider more carefully what Adorno suggests is Hegel’s “more powerful argument”: Adorno contends that the pursuit of individual interests and passions, the pursuit of *individual* self-preservation, despite its necessity and even attaining to the status of what Hegel calls the infinite right of the subject, is, nonetheless, on its own and taken in isolation from consideration of the ends of humanity as a whole, fundamentally irrational and unsustainable for the species.<sup>33</sup> There is a priority of species-life over the individual because the individual depends upon the species for every aspect of its existence, whereas the species does not depend upon any one particular individual for its survival and flourishing (although this does not exclude the possibility that “world historical individuals” can radically change the course of spirit’s development). Thus, Adorno writes: “On the one hand, the totality should oppress everything that is beneath it and, potentially at least, threaten it with destruction, while on the other hand, it is a cohesive force to which society owes its survival” (2006, 49). The ambivalent thought here is that although self-preservation in the name of the species can appear as oppressive to the particulars whose potentialities are reduced and sacrificed as means (i.e., can appear as the negative), self-preservation can nonetheless *only* be rational and free when pursued as an end of the species as a whole (i.e., pursued as an end that is universal in character).<sup>34</sup>

The injustice to which senseless death and suffering points, then, is not to the logic of sacrifice as such, which is a constant presence in the life of the species thus far viewed from the perspective of universal history, a symptom of injustice rather than the source. Rather, to the extent that such senseless suffering is preventable, mitigable, or eliminable, injustice signals that consciousness of ourselves as a universal species has been insufficiently actualized, that the effects of sacrifice are differentially distributed such that many are sacrificed for the service of one, some are sacrificed for the service of others, and this is the key: *according to principles that are reified as second nature* (we can think of hierarchies based on characteristics like gender, religion, or race, or the economic principles of the market).<sup>35</sup> The problem, then, is that some human beings have to overbear the burden of sacrifice based on conceptions of the species that *fall short* of the universal. This is a

negative statement of Hegel's claim that *Geist* as a species progresses from the consciousness of freedom of *one* (essentially a form of tyranny) to the consciousness of freedom of *some* (slave societies and caste societies, a category to which we clearly still belong) to the consciousness of freedom of *all*.<sup>36</sup> Insofar as self-consciousness as a universal species has not been fully realized, the negative necessarily appears for consciousness as the struggle for the freedom of all, the struggle to reconceive the species as truly universal. This, I think, is what Hegel means by the universal appearing as the negative, and, likewise, why Adorno contends that we must think the concept of universality as negativity. James Ingram puts the claim of negative universality in the following way:

Perversions of the universal are most effectively fought on the ground of the universal. . . . Universality . . . is best thought *negatively*, as the negation of particular exclusions, inequalities, and false universals. In a Hegelian formulation . . . universality becomes actual the moment a historically given universal is contested in the name of the universal value it betrays. (Ingram 2013, 7 and 20)<sup>37</sup>

Note that in the opposition between the particular and universal in which the universal appears as the negative, the concept of the universal species is a not an ideal that remains unchanged. As Adorno suggests, "[a] true preponderance of the particular would not be attainable except by changing the universal" (1973, 313). Just as the life-form concept is both presupposed and altered by particular natural-historical judgments, the concept of the human species is fundamentally altered through its negative instances that are contested and opposed. Nonetheless, such instances can come to appear as negative (as a "defect" in Thompson's terms) only by referring to the human life-form whose species-potentialities have not yet been exhausted.

## CONCLUSION: NEGATIVE UNIVERSAL HISTORIES IN FANON AND LYNN HUNT

In her reading of Hegel and the Haitian Revolution, Susan Buck-Morss argues that the same sympathy which bordered on enthusiasm that had been aroused in Kant by the French Revolution was aroused in the young Hegel by the revolution in Saint-Domingue (2009, 114–15). There is of course no question here of defending any aspect of Hegel's openly racist remarks in his philosophy of history (not to mention his questionable empirical research),<sup>38</sup> but I have been arguing in this chapter, with the help of Adorno, that there is nonetheless something worthwhile in thinking through his understanding of negativity and historical transformation, along with the significance of referring to the

human species. In closing, I want to turn briefly to two accounts of negative universal history in the work of Frantz Fanon and the work of the historian Lynn Hunt, both of whom demonstrate the enduring political and normative importance of referring to the human species in the negative.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues—from an appropriated Marxist-humanist perspective—that both theoretically and practically, the humanism of the European Enlightenment is a “dishonest ideology” that has served the aims of colonial domination (Sartre, quoted in Fanon 2004, lvii). Fanon’s analysis can be read as employing both strategies of natural history highlighted above. On the one hand, Fanon argues that European development in the so-called modern era was built upon the natural resources and laboring bodies of the third world, a dialectic of enlightenment that has resulted in a global capitalist economy that dominates colonizer and colonized alike, with the global south bearing a grossly disproportionate burden of poverty and suffering. Fanon writes: “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The riches which are choking it are those plundered from the underdeveloped peoples” (2004, 58). On the other hand, Fanon’s analysis is also an attempt at de-reification, arguing that the notion of the “human” at the heart of European modernity is a highly historicized and particular conception based on fundamental exclusions and inequalities that betrayed its status as a false universal. Nonetheless, throughout his text, Fanon deliberately employs the language of the human, suggesting that we must “humanize” the world, that the price paid by “suffering humanity” is unjustified, that faced with the “denial of the human” we must “invent a human in full,” and write “a new history of the human” (2004, 57, 236, 238). In short, Fanon decries a particular conception of the human-species in the very name of the human-species, an act whose apparent circularity does not undermine either its political or normative force. Initially, it appears that one way to read this claim is as one of expansion or inclusion, namely, the concept of the species must be expanded to include more members, whose exclusion had been a condition for the determining of the initial concept. But it is important that this claim is not simply read in terms of quantity (expand the concept simply to include more people, although it certainly is that) but also in terms of quality, namely, that quantitative expansion is at once a qualitative shift, one that alters the species concept to which our natural-historical judgments refer. In arguing against colonial dehumanization in the name of the human, Fanon’s procedure operates in the negative, where identifying a defect—a universal in the form of negativity, a false universal—provides further content to the life-form concept, thereby creating a “new human” (2004, 239).

In a similar vein, Lynn Hunt argues in her book, *Inventing Human Rights*, that the declaring of universal rights in the end of the eighteenth-century set off a “bulldozer force” in which false universals that excluded religious



minorities, non-property owners, free blacks and slaves, women, and in our own time, sexual minorities, came to be increasingly challenged (though of course, not without many reversals, oppositions, regressions, and ambivalences) (Hunt 2007, 160). Hunt describes an “inner logic” of rights that operates in the same register of the negative described above: false universals of the human species were repeatedly contested in the name of the human species that the former betrayed (2007, 150).<sup>39</sup> As with Fanon, Hunt argues that the changes in the species-concept are not only quantitative but also qualitative; in her case, she argues that the very capacity for human empathy and our understanding of the suffering human body was fundamentally altered through the ongoing declaration of universal rights. Hunt also appeals to the same circularity characteristic of all our natural-historical judgments, arguing that the process of declaring rights against a prevailing conception of the human “has an undeniable circularity to it: you know the meaning of human rights because you feel distressed when they are violated” (2007, 214). This could be restated as follows: we understand the meaning and significance of the human species when the universal appears in the form of the negative.

In this chapter, I have put forward the following three theses: that we can refer meaningfully to the human species, that this reasoning is both circular and weakly normative, and that transformations in the concept of the species take place via negativity. Returning the synthesis of Hegel and Adorno proffered in this chapter, we can sum up the thesis of negative universal history in the following way: for Hegel, what he calls the end of history (*Endzweck*—an ultimate purpose or goal, not history literally coming to an end) is the realization of universal consciousness of freedom for all; for Adorno (surely a more consistent negativist than Hegel), it is the prevention of total catastrophe and self-annihilation—both sides of the conscious development of species-life must be held together, and neither claim can be concretely grasped without the other. Negative universal history takes place in the ongoing struggle in the space between consciousness of freedom for *some* and consciousness of freedom for *all*, and it is in the possibility of determining a genuine *all*, an actualized universal species, that we might be able to talk about a revived, emancipatory politics of humanism, envisioned by thinkers as varied as Marx and Fanon.<sup>40</sup>

## NOTES

1. This was a speech given by Lorde at a conference on de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* in 1979, New York City, where she criticized white feminists for excluding black feminists in the same way that they had been excluded by a male-dominated academy. On the legacy of Lorde’s statement, see Olson (2000).

2. Much has been written on Hegel's Eurocentric and racist remarks, particularly in the context of his philosophy of history and philosophical anthropology. I should emphasize, however, that it is not my aim in this chapter to enter into these debates concerning Hegel on race. Rather, my aim is to defend a specific understanding of negative universal history and its concomitant concept of the human species that can potentially serve as the theoretical underpinning for an account of emancipatory historical transformation. The passage most frequently cited in defense of Hegel on the issue of race is from the addition to §393 in the Anthropology where he writes: "Human being is implicitly rational [*an sich vernünftig*]; herein lies the possibility of equality of right for all human beings,—the nullity of a rigid distinction between races that have rights and those that have none" (Hegel 2007: §393A), which suggests a universal equality of humankind founded in the common capacity for rationality. However, this passage is complicated by the fact that it is followed by an extended, highly speculative, and exceedingly racist discussion of the characteristics of different races based on a distinction Hegel draws between the old and new worlds. For overviews of Hegel on race, see de Laurentiis (2015) and Parekh (2009). For trenchant critiques of Hegel on this score, see Tibebe (2011), Bernasconi (1998, 2000), and Purtschert (2010). For defenses of Hegel, see Buchwalter (2009), Moellendorf (1992), and Houlgate (2005). The exchange between Joseph McCarney and Robert Bernasconi in "Hegel's Racism?" (2003) and Terry Pinkard's forthcoming *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice*, esp. chap. 3, are also instructive.

3. The idea of non-reformist reform is taken from André Gorz. Fraser in fact rejects the reform/revolution distinction and argues from the perspective of the distinction between what she calls affirmative and transformative strategies, which emphasize end results and root causes, respectively. Despite the difference in terminology, I nonetheless think the concept is helpful here, and radical, revolutionary changes are surely ones that attempt to address root causes.

4. See also Stone, forthcoming, especially the sections on de Beauvoir and Fanon.

5. In their introduction to the edited volume, *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*, Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon also argue against a narrow interpretation of Lorde's maxim that would dogmatically exclude the use of certain theoretical tools deemed to belong to masters. They write: "Even if it were true that his house cannot be dismantled by his tools, slaves have historically done something more provocative with such tools than attempt to dismantle the Big House. There are those who used those tools, developed additional ones, and built houses of their own on more or less generous soil. It is our view that the proper response is to follow their lead, transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas through building our own houses of thought. . . . Theory is not a tool of the master. It belongs to us all since it is that without which we could not build our own thought" (Gordon and Gordon 2006, ix, xi). In a similar spirit, Adorno writes: "Philosophy . . . must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept" (Adorno 1973: 15). See also Mills (2015) where he assesses the plausibility of the "master's tools" argument with respect to Rousseau and social contract theory.

6. Susan Buck-Morss also employs a conception of negative universal history in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Buck-Morss 2009). Although I am influenced by Buck-Morss' account here, the concept of negative universal history itself remains undertheorized in her book, and this chapter can be read as an attempt to fill this deficit.

7. For an excellent overview of this concept and Adorno's use of it throughout his career, see Pensky (2004).

8. For a defense of Hegel against the supposed Adornian charge that Hegel ignores particulars in his account of history, see MacDonald (2006).

9. For alternative accounts of the relation between Adorno and Hegel, especially concerning the question of philosophy of history, see Bernstein (2004, 2016). See also Finlayson (forthcoming), esp. the section on Adorno.

10. Adorno writes: "History is the unity of continuity and discontinuity" (1973: 320). For an assessment of the Marxian critique of human rights and whether or not Marxian commitments can be made compatible with a commitment to human rights, see Boyd (2009).

11. See also Vázquez-Arroyo (2008).

12. For a recent attempt to work out the importance of Hegel's definition of *Geist* as the I that is We and the We that is I for social theory, see Honneth (2012).

13. This reference to *Volksgeist* as a species can easily be read in a racist vein. However, I am suggesting that this is a misunderstanding of Hegel's claim, both within the narrow context of his philosophy of history and within the broader context of his philosophy more generally, particularly with respect to his understanding of the concepts of both *Geist* and *Gattung*. I can offer two arguments here (both of which warrant independent treatments of their own) against the racist reading of Hegel's claim. First, *Volksgeist* and *Weltgeist* are reciprocally constituted and cannot be cleanly separated from one another, suggesting that the universal species for-itself Hegel ultimately has in mind must be the human species as a whole, or simply *Geist* as such. Second, the concept of species or *Gattung* plays a systematic role for Hegel in the constitution of *Geist* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Science of Logic*, and arguably in the transition from the *Philosophy of Nature* to the *Philosophy of Mind*. This suggests, again, that the universal species for-itself can only be the human one, and can only refer to local, national, or racial groupings in a highly qualified and impoverished sense.

14. Both Hegel and Fichte also argue for the "completeness" of animals in comparison with the "potentiality" of human beings whose development is always an achievement, an act of freedom. See Hegel (2011, 151).

15. This phrase is borrowed from Jay Bernstein.

16. Another way of putting this objection is that it doesn't amount to an account of historical development on the basis of freedom at all but is simply an account of natural development. That Kant intends this is clear from the opening of his essay on universal history, where he suggests that he is attempting to be the Newton and Kepler of human development (although six years later, in his *Critique of Judgment*, he is much less optimistic, famously claiming that it would be impossible for there even to be a Newton of a blade of grass). See Kant (1987, 282–83; 1991, 42). For an

alternative account of how Hegel's philosophy of history mirrors Kant's approach in the third *Critique*, see Wenning (2009, esp. 39).

17. Thompson borrows this example from Rawls (1955).

18. Thompson identifies the general form of natural-historical judgments as "The S is (or has, or does) F" (2008, 64). See also Thompson (2004, ms).

19. See Thompson (2008, 74, 80–81).

20. On the force of this sense of normativity, see chaps. 10 and 11 in Ginsborg (2014).

21. Compare with Jaeggi (2014).

22. See Melamed (2012).

23. For an interpretation of this claim in terms of relations of material incompatibility, see Brandom (2000).

24. In "Recognition Beyond Struggle: On a Liberatory Account of Hegelian Recognition," Monahan (2006) notes that Hegel's discussion of self-consciousness importantly begins with an account of pure recognition and desire, rather than with the master/bondsman relation. Monahan stresses this in order to argue against "agonistic" readings of recognition that mistake the struggle for recognition for the entirety of Hegel's recognition theory. I am in general agreement with him regarding the critique of agonistic readings but would also stress that the concept of pure recognition introduced by Hegel gains its content and determinacy through reference to its negative instances, of which the master/slave relation is a paradigmatic case.

25. Hegel also associates the negative with the power of self-movement: "the concrete is self-moving [*das sich Bewegende*] only because it divides itself [*sich scheider*] and turns itself into the non-actual [*zum Unwirklichen macht*]" (1977, ¶32).

26. See Adorno (1973, 5). For defenses of this thesis, see Bernstein (2001, chapters 4 and 6) and O'Connor (2013, chapter 3).

27. On Hegel's speculative identity thesis, see Ng (2013).

28. Hegel writes: "World history begins with its *general purpose*—that the *concept* of spirit be satisfied—but only *in itself*, i.e., as *nature* ... the whole business of world history is the labor to make this drive conscious" (2011, 93).

29. See chapter 1 of Deborah Cook's *Adorno on Nature* (2011), where she argues that the concept of natural history forms the basis of Adorno's critical materialism.

30. Hegel writes that there is a helpless "moral sorrow" in our apprehension of history and that we are in fact "repulsed" by this spectacle (2011, 90).

31. See Hegel (2011, 121–22).

32. Mark Alznauer has convincingly argued that what Hegel calls the "absolute right of world spirit" does not serve as an amoralist exception clause that allows us to exit our contexts of ethical obligations and judgments but instead concerns our right to enter the moral space of reasons. Alznauer is concerned to show that Hegel's view of history does not make it impossible for us to attribute moral responsibility to individuals and that generally, history does not trump considerations of morality, even if there is a division of labor between moral and historical perspectives on particular individuals and social contexts. If his argument is correct (and I believe it is), then it applies here as well: just as individuals are not morally exempt from the perspective of world history, neither can the senseless suffering of individuals be morally justified from the perspective of world history. See Alznauer (2012).

33. Hegel (2011, 91); Adorno (2006, 44): “For the principle of self-preservation is itself irrational and particular if it is restricted to individuals, to the particular individual rationality of individuals.”

34. Adorno also writes: “the human race in fact can only survive in and through the totality” (2006, 47).

35. On this version of negative equality see Butler (2004, 2009). My suggestion is that the Hegelian-Adornian argument of the differential distribution of sacrifice according to reified principles runs parallel to Butler’s argument concerning the differential distribution of precariousness and vulnerability. Precariousness and dependency are ontological conditions of species-life, but they appear as sacrificial insofar as they operate according to principles and concepts that reify a false or less-than-universal notion of the species.

36. Hegel (2011, 88).

37. See also Ingram (2016).

38. See Bernasconi (1998).

39. Compare with Honneth’s “grammar” of struggles for recognition. See Honneth (1995).

40. Earlier drafts of this chapter were presented at the Colloquium on Philosophy and the Social Sciences in Prague, the Critical Theory Roundtable at Yale, Vanderbilt University, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and the annual meeting of the Association for Adorno Studies at the Université de Montréal. I would like to extend my thanks to these audiences, as well as to Michael Monahan and an anonymous reader for this volume, for their thoughtful comments and questions.



## Chapter Seven

# Hegel among the Cannibals

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera

The Chilean experience with networks and computers analyzed by science historian Eden Medina and myself in our respective books *Cybernetic Revolutionaries* and *Story of a Death Foretold*, which a recent article in *The New Yorker* highlighted as highly relevant to the understanding and critical exploration of today's accelerated societies of control, was an example of collective "intelligent resistance." Although destroyed by the military after the coup d'état that brought the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende (UP hereafter) to a tragic end on September 11, 1973, it stands as an exemplar of collective subversion and organization, institutional creativity vis-à-vis the establishment, and theoretical, aesthetic, technological, as well as legal-political realistic yet radically hopeful practices.

These practices, which provided the so-called Chilean Way of the 1970s with its political spirit, included the shift from first-order to second-order cybernetics, infographics, (institutional) operations research and psychiatry, the Hegelo-Marxist critique of the link between post-war's international legal and economic expansionist establishment and violence, reconstructed anthropology and indigenous cosmology, as well as the biology of viable dynamic systems. These theoretical practices, different though they may be, share a common gesture: they all reject any form of analysis seeking to simplify apparently dualistic or contradictory phenomena (biological, machinic, institutional, or subjective) to some deeper unity, more fundamental, stable, and indivisible, as unacceptably reductionist.

Instead of aspiring to a higher or deeper unity or individuality, these practices affirm the voracious multiplicity or "dividuality" upon which, in the case of what we now call biopolitical as well as institutional and subjective socio-genesis, disciplinary or hierarchical forms are giving place to assemblages of control. Not only that, but in realistically embracing such transformation they



seek to take it in the direction of a more intense radicalization (as in nonlinear “radical dualisms”) and a fuller realization of freedom and liberation.

This chapter argues that such practices updated the force of Hegelian critique, decolonizing it, while enacting a milieu of liberation and universal freedom for decolonizing practices, thereby criticalizing them. It is in this sense that we can begin to speak of placing Hegel among “cannibals,” whose spatial-temporal and institutional practices are full of the radical dualisms that the German philosopher envisioned without allowing himself (or others) to properly historicize them.

Importantly, these theories recognized the existence of a meta-level or a higher dimension beyond dualisms in which observers observed and interacted with dual “systems” or organizations. Such organizations featured a specific kind of relation between themselves and their surrounding environments that was determined not by compatibility of adaptive harmony but rather by counteraction and oppugnancy.

Biologists, cyberneticians, and comparative anthropologists working along these lines used terms such as “recursivity,” “feedback looping,” or “zero-value” to describe the virtuous circularity taking place at the border between individuals or groups and their surrounding environs. The key term, however, borrowed from biology and the study of the brain, was “metabolic homeostasis.” It refers to a kind of performativity as that which explains the stability of the terms of a relationship. This is a relative stability characterized by time lags and spatial discontinuity in the system’s dynamics, rather than the other way around. This also meant to acknowledge that the related termini were themselves moving and changing.

In accordance with such theories, observers interacted with their observed environs in ways that complicated our given conceptions of the relationship between frameworks of observation (horizons, background/foreground perspectives, small/big spatial frameworks, transcendental or formalistic frames, schemas, and structures) and what is being observed (facts, things, phenomena, content, space time, and history).

What in principle appeared to the observer as a recognizable dual structure, when looked at more closely and carefully seemed to vanish, and the perceived duality unraveled. It became “dividual” rather than returning to the simplicity of the individual. Thus, for instance, anthropologists looking at the north-south axis architecture and organization of Amerindian villages, which seemed incompatible with accounts of those same groups that described their habitats in terms of concentric circles, came to the conclusion that these forms were not necessarily mutually exclusive but in fact could coexist. This is so, especially if one regards the concentric model of organization as an intermediary of sorts between the straight north/south dividing line and a ternary model that recursively impacts upon the previous two, and so on. The point of

such theories was to explore the possibility of perceiving an otherwise seemingly mutually exclusive situation.

An associated aim of this chapter is to apply not only such an insight to today's seemingly mutually exclusive division between "traditional" and "scientific" or critical approaches to space-hedging and institutions but also the thought and practice accompanying them and their compromise. A compromise that seems to have resulted in paralysis in thought as well as political practice: I refer to the fact that nowadays we seem more able to imagine the end of the world, an imminent implosion through further enclosure and extraction, or to *think* the post-human world, full automation beyond bodies human and nonhuman, than the transformation of this one through the actions of people. Furthermore, although our more or less liberal societies are fond of defending dissent and the freedom to criticize, at least in theory, they all tend to consider any call toward actual transformative action as potentially violent, harmful, or totalitarian.

## WAYS OF SEEING AND SIGHTING

For simplicity's sake, let's say that there are two main conceptions or approaches to visual-spatial imagination, thought, and action that oppose each other in our current situation: one is empirical or "realistic" and the other transcendental or "idealistic"; one is deemed traditional and the other less so. The compromise between these two positions, often identified with Kant's critical project as well as with the notions of space and time it helped to establish, organizes our perspective and the way we conceive of the world, our knowledge of it, and its order. German-Japanese visual artist Hito Steyerl has described this perspectival compromise, which she calls "linear perspective," better than most. It is worth quoting her at length. She says:

Our traditional sense of orientation—and with it, modern concepts of time and space—are based on a stable line: the horizon line. Its stability hinges on the stability of an observer, who is thought to be located on a ground of sorts, a shoreline, a boat—a ground that can be imagined as stable even if in fact it is not. . . . The construction of linear perspective declares the view of a one-eyed and immobile spectator as a norm—and this view is itself assumed to be natural, scientific, and objective. Thus, linear perspective is based on abstraction, and does not correspond to any subjective perception. Instead, it computes a mathematical, flattened, infinite, continuous, and homogeneous space, and declares to be reality. Linear perspective creates the illusion of a quasi-natural view to the "outside," as if the image plane was a window opening onto the "real" world. . . . This space defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable. It allows the calculation of future risk, which can be anticipated, and

therefore, managed. As a consequence, linear perspective not only transforms space, but also introduces the notion of linear time, which allows mathematical prediction and, with it, linear progress. (2012, 14, 18)

According to this, what makes critique distinctive across its many incarnations (from Kant and Hegel to Frankfurt Critical Theory, its French nemesis, or their avatars in the Americas such as Drucilla Cornell, Eduardo Mendieta and Santiago Castro-Gómez, or Amy Allen) is its focus on more or less successful attempts to ground normativity and rationality on a stable single horizon and viewpoint, which defines the limits of communication and reasonability or understanding, within which things could be made visible. As Steyerl points out, this viewpoint, assumed as if it were natural and objective, transforms space and time in a way that makes them computable, infinitesimal, and calculable. With it comes the idea of narrative linear progress, which stabilizes a critical conception of progress as well as the centrality of the viewer “mirrored in the vanishing point, and thus constructed by it” (2012, 19).

One might call this imaginary formation, which includes understanding as well as judgment, also normative judgment, a “geography of reason,” in a reference to Kant’s lifelong interest in speculative and physical geography (which he explicitly defined as an attempt to make things visible on an imaginary plane) as well as his and other uses of spatiality and place as a site of moral authority and a model for the mind as well as for law and politics.

To some, appealing to Kantian constructivist or Hegelian re-constructivist strategies of grounding on a linear perspective is key to avoiding today’s generalized slippage toward relativism and the negation of progress. Others find it surprising that in this day and age of multiculturalism and socially (or digitally) constructed identities anybody would still defend foundationalist or reconstructivist projects for the grounding of normativity and reason. We are all post-Kantian in this sense, or “critical.”

But if this is true and we are all “critical,” then it can be argued that critique has gone mainstream. Rather than being maverick, a creative counter-current, it would have become the given and acceptable frame or horizon of our vision. If this is so, then we can justifiably ask: in the process of moving toward the center, has critique lost its edge and capacity to help us see things, think, and act otherwise, ever more critically? You can see the ensuing paradox: the danger here is that of critique taming itself, its aims and methodology as well as the creative force of its legacy, in a way that makes it unable to think the world after the downfall of linear perspective, a world saturated with military, financial, and entertainment images’ views from above. Arguably, such is the world we live in.

Consider the more concrete and contemporarily relevant incarnations of critique as method, aim, and legacy. Take cosmopolitanism. The Kantian enlightenment ideal according to which we are all citizens of the world and responsible for it becomes a form of parochialism, instead of being its opposite, the minute it is claimed as one of “our values” and elevated over and against the views of allegedly enclosed or backward societies and cultures. Similarly, liberalism (with its supposedly universalist creed of human rights or liberties, democracy, and the rule of law) has today become almost indistinguishable from conservatism. An example of this is the conservative attack on human rights, which they say can be replaced just as well by an (English or American) Bill of Rights. In this debate liberals do not help matters by referring to such things as rights, the rule of law, and democracy as “our” values.

The resulting paradox becomes apparent when we ask: “if these are our values, which define who ‘we’ are, then who are ‘they’?” As is the case with the War on Terror we realize all too quickly that “they” are not simply identifiable as foreigners or barbarians pushing at the gates, “the enemy” of a sort of Schmittian dualism concerned with drawing lines between enemy and friend, inside and outside. Such linear dualism tends to be useless in today’s context, for as the Paris attacks of 2016 made ominously clear, “they” may well turn out to be citizens of our countries. Instead of the two sides of a horizontal line, here we are looking at concentric circles in which one begins to notice the latent presence of triadic as well as even more radical forms that disrupt any stable horizon. Ditto for “them” fighting in Syria and elsewhere. It has been noted how sometimes, indeed too often, “we” cannot even name them: are they ISIS, ISIL, Daesch, Sirak, or something else? And if we cannot even name them, how can we start to identify and name ourselves. It turns out we are not that certain of who “we” are or where we are.

French rhetorician Pierre-Joseph Salazar controversially asked after the Paris attacks: is the majority of “us” in Europe ready to die for equality, liberty, and fraternity just as much as “them,” who seem to be? If the answer is mostly negative, he says, then “they have already won and we have lost.” As Salazar says, this is a question of politics as the art or articulation and rhetoric as a weapon of mass persuasion as well as seduction. But it is also a matter of effective organization, our ability to see triadic transitional transformative figures in what at first looks like linear, diametric asymmetrical oppositions.

Later on I will argue that his emphasis on this ability to visualize triadic structures out of seemingly irreconcilable opposites in a progressive line is what places the German philosopher and critic of Right G.W.F. Hegel among Amerindians who have a penchant for nonlinear narratives, double twists, and figures of inter-transformability, which the latter apply in their thinking of the cosmos, society, as well as in their institutional practices. This claim is surely going to ruffle some feathers.

For now let us simply remind ourselves that while our institutional organizations seem trapped in a vicious circle of crises and imaginations of apocalypse, of tragic terrorist acts and crises followed by farcical declarations of emergency and security measures, theirs (whomever “they” are) do not depend on the same narratives and chronologies. Understood in this way the War on Terror is not so much a dualist clash of civilizations but rather a war taking place in a Western chronosphere subjected to apocalyptic commotions and disruptions in time confronted by a chrono-politics (in this case, the Pax Islamica of desert-nomads) that betrays time and the Western chronosphere altogether (as Reza Negarestani says). Put otherwise, the conflicts of today’s world cannot be perceived or understood merely through the lens of a kind of Hegelian master-slave dialectics or the constructivity of recognition. Instead, we need to focus on the failures of recognition and critical constructivism. This is a demand for the decolonization of critique and critical theory, which I wholeheartedly accept. Here, Negarestani comes closer to Frantz Fanon than even Ali Shariati, who translated *The Wretched of the Earth* into Persian, ever did.

I have used an example from the farcical (i.e., repetitive, boring) geopolitics of the War on Terror, but could just as well have used a *different* one arising in the context of the human rights of immigrants arriving into Europe and the United States, or those being forcibly displaced in Colombia, and the result would have been the *same*. I also referred to the paradox of Western democracies in which the liberal-conservative alleged opponents appear as boring equals to an extremely bored public. The same result, as novelist Douglas Coupland says, is that bored people crave war. If so, then these farcical oppositions appear to us as something that must be opposed from an altogether different position, not only in the Western world. That sense of planetary generalization or universalization means we must also criticize post- and decolonial gestures.

Therefore, our chief enemy here is a dualism that purports to bring within sight everything that is out there but in doing so pushes away too many “small places,” minor geographies, literatures, and cosmologies. Thus, we may have to reconsider the supposed universality of dualist critique without abandoning universalization or falling back onto the crass relativism or localism of many current critiques of universalism. We must also reconsider the imaginary landscape, the chronosphere, and geography of thought and action that mainstream critique brings forth. If so, then our question is “can we move beyond critique-as-mainstream?”

I believe Hegel can be an ally in this endeavor, a position that sets me in a collision course against the mainstream opinion for and against Hegel. Some philosophers (including many Hegelians) and critics, especially so-called postmodern and postcolonial theorists, tend to identify our chief enemy,

dualism, with the voracious thought and system invented in the nineteenth century by the German philosopher: his “logic,” as well as the dialectical materialisms supposedly derived from it.

In Britain, where I teach and write most of my books, Hegel stopped being popular in philosophy departments around the time Bertrand Russell went to Cambridge. Thoroughly confused by the nonsense his professors seemed to be spouting about Spirit, the Absolute, and so on, he opted instead for the assumed clarity of mathematics. And yet the paradox he is so famously recognized for, which he helped to elaborate and explore, might be redescribed as a version of the dialectical tension appearing within an otherwise clear and exact totality. Hegel also seems to be making a comeback here, not only among followers of the witty and controversial philosopher Slavoj Žižek, a colleague at the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, but also among young activists and hacktivists who build and improve upon the insights of the second-order cyberneticians of the 1970s interested in organizations, rules, and institutions, where I contend Hegelianism survived outside of the philosophical establishment and philosophy as a discipline. That trajectory intersects with branches of psychiatry concerned also with institutions as well as legal critique.

Analytical and postmodern philosophers, for all their differences, share a criticism of Hegelian dialectics as being too voracious, eating up all difference out there, and thus resulting in a sort of inflated, constipated system with totalitarian tendencies dangerously realized in practice. Crucially, as suggested above, this is also today’s mainstream criticism against the left and revolutionary or radically transformative models of action.

These analytical, postmodern and postcolonial critics are wrong. In fact I believe Hegel’s solution to the question posited before (can we move beyond the mainstream?) must be made ours and that, despite appearances, he can be an ally in our quest to shift the current geography of reason. Rather than dismissing him and his system as too voracious, we should take this digestive metaphor to the end. Hence the need for a “return to Hegel” in order to save the project of critique from itself. But also, more originally, my proposal to place Hegel among cannibals.

## HEGELIAN ANTHROPOPHAGY

But what can it mean to place Hegel among cannibals, and why should putting a nineteenth-century romantic philosopher together with some Amerindians be the only way to save our modern soul? Let’s begin by surveying more closely, from a philosophical rather than visual perspective, the two sides of today’s intellectual landscape.

In the traditional position every conceptual horizon or formalistic framework seems “too rough and abstract to catch the fine texture of the reality out there” (2014, 103). Seen from this perspective, reality out there is either too rich or too dynamic and will elude any discursive matrix, formal-transcendental *a priori*, or ahistorical scheme. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, this is “the empiricist shift of perspective,” but, crucially, it happens within Kant’s geography of reason (*ibid.*).

Then there is the other side, the less traditional or transcendental conception according to which it is reality that fails to fit any discursive matrix, any fundamental scheme, or what the younger Hegel called in his essay *The Life of Jesus* “the eternal law of morality,” understood as the formal constant of all cultural institutions, “of all legislation and of the sacred books of all nations” (1948, 78–84; 2014, 101–54). In this case, what Kant called autonomous or “Pure Reason” transcends the visual, sensible, and empirical phenomena in the direction of what he called, somewhat cryptically, the *a priori* of being. However, at the key moment, the radical and irruptive nature of thinking unveiled by Kant is brought under the control of systems that do not allow for the actualization of all the options, “so that some remain blank, empty possibilities without actualization” (1998, 103).

Chief among such “systems of control” are the systems of organization, regulation and selection or deselection, communication and exchange (i.e., law, the nation-state, corporate organizations, property, and the market) studied by first- to second-order cybernetics.

Summing up, there are two mainstream conceptions of the relation between the observers and the observed, both of them determining and operating within a Kantian space: one in which reality is in excess of the framework of observation and another in which reality is lacking in relation to such an idealized, ahistorical framework.

Crucially, these two conceptions more or less coincide with the two dominant readings of Hegel in our time: a Right, conservative reading and a Leftist, revolutionary reading, as Clayton Crockett and Creston David put it in their introduction to a volume on Hegel coedited by them and Žižek.

The former reads Hegel’s doctrine of Being as at first appearing to be an infinite dialectical becoming that moves “ever closer to Absolute Spirit but in truth loses its nerve and folds back into the security-domain” (Crockett and Davis 2011, 1) (method sundered from reality). This is Charles Taylor’s 1975 version of Hegel, “confined to a liberal bourgeois subjectivity grounded in the Kantian idealised split between Reason and external world” (*ibid.*), with Reason freezing the radicality of any ontology of irruptive becoming or political hacking from above (i.e., from the vertical perspective of the *a priori* of Being) through the nation-state, the market, and similar top-down systems of organization, regulation, and surveillance elevated to a position



of transcendence thanks to their fake compromise with Kantian/Christian transcendence. This conservative position “further assumes that the heart of Hegel’s own structure enacts the nothing of Kant’s thing-in-itself [precisely] because the structure of Kant’s metaphysics collapses” (Crockett and Davis 2011, 1–2), and since content cannot fill all the places predetermined by form, Spirit is “left to tarry with form” irrespective of content (ibid.). What Žižek describes here in terms of the philosophical debate concerning the form-content tension is in fact central to the geopolitical project of framing, enclosing, and making visible the various forms of life that inhabit given spaces. That was not only the point of Kant’s own geography but also, I contend, the starting point of modernizing views invested in surveilling and engineering the lived environment.

In our time, this vertical perspective or “view from above” is made most concrete in the various elements that constitute what I.G.R. Shaw has defined as a “*biopolitical project of enclosure* to surveil, secure, and destroy humans and nonhumans” considered as hostile forms of life within a multidimensional warscape that includes military satellites, planes, drones, cybernetic simulated environments, and PRISM-like electronic total surveillance (2016).

On the other hand there is the leftist, revolutionary reading of Hegel’s philosophy. It rests on the idea that the internal logic of the concept (*Begriff*) of Spirit “always and perpetually traverses beyond (*Vor-stellung*) the instantiation (or fulfillment) of itself” in terms that are static or frozen, and into the future—the moment of risk, as Crockett and Davis put it (2011, 2–3). In this reading, which coincides more or less with the empiricist move, and is in that sense more “materialist” than the previous one, reality or history is in excess of static frameworks, always going beyond them. If so, then Hegel’s ontology is not a self-referential, purely formal method sundered from the world but inseparable from it.

Thus, for instance, leftist revolutionaries must constantly grapple with issues of formal method in relation to hardcore content—as it happened in the 1970s in Chile. Having issued the proper decrees concerning the nationalization of the copper and financial sectors as well as the relevant compensatory measures, and having created through law the so-called social sector of the economy, the problem became that of how, with what method, could Chilean revolutionaries solve the managerial challenges that resulted from nationalizations and socialization, as well as dealing with the formal issues arising from their attempt to carry out these revolutionary transformations without destroying law and the state. In fact, between 1972 and 1973, as Chilean revolutionaries confronted the threat of counter-revolution, a major problem emerged: that of whether they should keep “theorizing” the revolution (i.e., coming up with clever legal theories about reparations and debt-payment negotiations, dealing with constitutional theories, and taking stock of the

ideas underpinning Project Cybersyn and Beat the Clock) or else substitute the theorizing of the revolution for the revolution itself (ibid.).

## THE PLOT THICKENS (VORACIOUSLY AND INFINITELY)

It is in relation to this question that Slavoj Žižek has insisted, together with other thinkers of the Birkbeck school of criticism seeking to reinterpret the work and legacy of the German philosopher, that Hegel “reinscribes the transcendental frame back into the thing itself” (2014, 102). This is also the point made by the editors of *Hegel & The Infinite*, mentioned and credited in the previous section, all of whom unambiguously come down on the side of the latter, leftist, reading of Hegel. As they say, “Hegel pushes form beyond its static definition and with it subverts ... Christian transcendence” (Crockett and Davis 2011, 1–3).

However, things may not be as simple as the opposition between conservative and leftist readings of Hegel’s wrestling with the form/content opposition might have us believe. It has been pointed out that there may be a convergence between the conservative and apolitical reading of Hegel’s method qua method, and the leftist reading of dynamic ontology. Indeed, as revolutionaries become “convulsed with questions of formal method and substitute the theorizing of the revolution for the revolution itself ... conservatives adopt a ... dynamic social ontology to justify the ravages of capitalist repression” (Crockett and Davis 2011, 1–3).

In this case, both form, or method, and idealized ontology as dynamic reality and World History (content) are deemed guilty of totalizing and violence, since they both voraciously consume otherness and collapse all differences into a monolithic horizon of sameness and identity. Put simply, Hegel’s system becomes “the belly turned mind,” as Žižek puts it a propos of a remark made by T.W. Adorno. More precisely, the Hegelian Idea turns into “a voracious eater that ‘swallows’ every object upon which it stumbles,” and Hegelianism can thus be seen as in fact a form of cannibalism, “the highest and most overblown expression of an oral economy” (Žižek 2011, 222).

The point of a “return to Hegel,” more truthful and more fruitful than the previous ones, would be to overcome such a convergence. That is to say, to move “beyond the interplay between these two dimensions,” the empirical and the transcendental (Žižek 2014, 97–98). But how? Furthermore, why now? Why Hegel (the voracious dialectician, the inventor of a monstrous universal history that according to his critics swallows up all non-Eurocentric difference) now, after postmodernism, postcolonialism, and the decolonial?

To begin answering the second question (why now?), let us take stock of the fact that in order to answer the first one (how?), Žižek takes a significant

detour, or as I prefer, a “Southern turn.” The issue of Žižek’s southern turn through the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss on Amerindian institutions, in his own reading of Hegel, has gone unnoticed and should be theorized. This turn becomes all the more important once we take seriously Žižek’s half-joking, provocative suggestion concerning Hegel’s representation by his critics as an excessively voracious eater. This is my cue to propose that Hegel himself is to be placed on the side of cannibals.

In brief, to understand how Hegel escapes the interplay between the empirical and the transcendental we must not try to deflect the charge of voraciousness by re-turning Hegel to the normalized persona of an austere, frugal Christian that abhors barbaric eating habits as well as the expenditure of gift-economies which supposedly threaten the strength of our systems in the future. On the contrary, as Žižek says, “one should carry this metaphor [of voraciousness] to the end” (2011, 221).

Žižek demonstrates how to do this when he contends that Hegel’s Absolute Knowledge amounts in the end to a thoroughly “emptied subject, a subject reduced to the role of pure observer . . . of the self-movement of the content,” letting go of it, freeing rather than internalizing it, dropping the object, as in the act of “squeezing the shit out of oneself” (2011, 224). After all, shitting is, as Žižek points out, the proper countermove to voracious or excessive eating. The point here is that the act of cognition is not the notional transfer, appropriation, or consummation of an object or its essence (what is more valuable as opposed to the more accidental, worthless attributes), internalized (and thus made private) by a subject, which, in a sort of bargaining relationship, leaves both sides (subject and object) better off (at a higher level or “synthesis”).

The implications of turning away from such an account of the act of cognition (knowledge as bargaining, prediction, and hedging) are momentous: on the one hand, it turns out that to know an object isn’t just the same as appropriating it (sublation) but to “liberate” the object and nature. Thus, nature isn’t to be understood as a reservoir of wealth-locked “natural resources” out there for the taking, ready at hand for us to consume without end. Put otherwise, nature and resources aren’t fate, a destiny, in the magnificent words of the late Eduardo Galeano. Nature (and natural resources) is neither a curse nor a blessing to be “hedged” or controlled; the moment we understand that we also understand that to liberate nature and its objects—letting go of it, as a process “that can be left to follow its inherent (albeit erratic) path”—is also to free ourselves (Crockett and Davis 2011, 16).<sup>1</sup>

This is why, as Jacques Derrida would have put it, “the frame itself is always also a part of the enframed” rather than an exception to it (Žižek 2011, 228).<sup>2</sup> More precisely, at the level of Absolute Knowledge in the Hegelian system, in “the last moment of absolute spirit (Philosophy), one readily notes

the synonymy between the verbs *aufheben* and *befreien* ('to liberate'), as well as *ablegen* ('to discard,' 'to remove,' 'to take away')," or to let go of one's ground and fall toward nature and its objects without reservation, in free fall, *à fonds perdu* (Malabou 2005, 156).<sup>3</sup>

And even though Žižek doesn't notice this, it's crucial here to take stock of the fact that an account of the act of cognition as bargaining and hedging would be completely risk-averse. It would leave nothing to chance or contingency, in the same way that the invention of the horizon and linear perspective at the dawn of modernity made space and time calculable and predictable (a formula included by Kant in his *Lectures on Geography* and the *Opus Postumum*), allowing also for the calculation of future risk which can thus be anticipated, hedged, and managed.

Crucially, this is also the same function performed by the ostensibly "normal" principle of our fundamental (market) institutions, which appeals to forms of consent, bargaining, and hedging as a stable ground in their treatment of the past, the future, future contingencies, and contingent claims. The importance of this insight can be recognized once we observe that the most important subjects and objects of trade in our markets, and also historical justice, are contingent claims. There is much more to say about the fact that markets and justice turn out to be media of contingency. But for now, let us say that if this is the case, then forms of knowledge and ordering that appeal to consent, bargaining, and hedging as a firm ground from which to predict the future may not be the best way to relate to the future at all. For all of these ways of seeing must necessarily assume an observer standing on a stable ground outside and above that which is being framed by his act of cognition and looking out (downward) toward a vanishing point on a flat horizon. Put otherwise, they all assume a human observer placed, as it were, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

The editors of *Hegel & The Infinite* do point out that this "normal" conception of the act of cognition "instead of opting for risk ... circles the wagons and settles into what basically amounts to a defensive posture" (Crockett and Davis 2011, 2). They use the image of encirclement and settlement to relate the consequences of Kant's ultimately defensive idea of cognition as well as conservative readings of Hegel that conceive of form (and observation) as detached from all things beyond itself. This is also, of course, the principle behind the move from the transcendental to the speculative form of money-as-capital and pricing.

Taking a cue from this insistence on the implications of opposed readings of Hegel for the way in which we understand and relate to the future and the past through our current fundamental institutions, our market and justice institutions, our ways of transiting from the transcendental to the speculative, I believe we should make explicit and take more seriously, radically so, the intention to "risk" Hegel.

## HEGEL'S (RISKY) INVESTMENT

Let's begin this section by pointing out that "encirclement" is one of the original meanings of the term "hedging," one which grounds its current usage in financial markets language, as it refers to property not only in terms of interpersonal relations of exchange at a fixed point in time but also, crucially, inter-temporal relations that entail the variation of the value of claims in time (i.e., justice as option).

Now it becomes clear that what is at stake in the cannibalistic metaphor, as well as in the passage from transcendence to speculation, is precisely the meaning of the future (as well as our relation to the past): the encirclement, hedging, and colonization of the inter-temporal dimension, or its (risky) liberation.

Now we can go on and state, not only with Hegel, Lévi-Strauss and the Amerindians but also with Žižek and Malabou, among others, that at the level of Absolute Knowing or what Hegel called Speculative Abrogation, the subject's freedom is to set free its object, to drop it, letting go of its future becoming. This means to opt for true risk at the very point where autonomous reason would ascend to the *a priori* of being and freeze (in time) or "hedge" the moment and logic of bargaining, internalization, or privatization. Claude Lévi-Strauss puts it thus, in relation to what he called the ground zero or "zero-value" of aboriginal institutions and the emergence of the rule as rule:

To this very day, mankind has always dreamed of seizing and fixing that fleeting moment when it was permissible to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded, that one could gain without losing, enjoy without sharing. At either end of the Earth and at both extremes of time, the Sumerian myth of the Golden Age and the Andaman myth of the future life correspond, the former placing the end of primitive happiness at a time when the confusion of languages made words common property, the latter describing the bliss of the hereafter as a heaven where women will no longer be exchanged, i.e., removing to an equally unattainable past or future the joys, eternally denied to social man, of a world in which one might keep to oneself, without others. (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 496–97)

In letting go of the object, the subject accepts the true risk of living with others, in common, as opposed to keeping to oneself, and thus to confront the task of inventing and reinventing social forms and institutions for reproduction; all the while becoming an observer of, or, rather, the registrar, as Žižek says, the one who inscribes in retrospective and prescribes in prospective language and reports "the object's autopoietic self-organization" (Žižek 2011, 224).

But isn't this "absolute liberation" just a setting free of the other after I did completely and voraciously internalize it (at least in thought)? What

if contradictions and splits are resolved by Hegel's voracious observer only in thought, as post-critical thinkers of dialectics would have it? Notice however how the subject of Hegelian speculation in the previous paragraph is described by Žižek as akin to the observer of second-order cybernetics and biology. As the designers of Chile's Project Cybersyn put it, this observer is different from the modern eye of perspective and navigation that resolves the problem of the relationship between frame and what is framed by deselecting, prior to experience, everything that escapes the frame as simply beyond the line of the horizon, or in probabilistic terms as an outlier, and then turning a blind eye to the act of framing or drawing a line itself.

One such designer puts it thus:

As studying phenomena, systems scientists should be taking account of the ... the self-reference of observing systems, rather than Kant's things-in-themselves. [For instance] Here's a woman in a teashop in the centre of Santiago [Chile's capital]. She voted for Allende. For her working class family, income has risen (in real terms) by a factor of four. She says she never dreamed of taking her little son into such a place. What the system is doing is to enhance her well-being. ... Who's responsible for this? She is: she belongs to the electorate who embraced Allende ... [Then t]here's President Nixon in the centre of Washington, 1972. What the system is doing is "going communist," and intervening with the US hegemony in Latin America. ... Responsibility for purposes in Chile had been with its president-and-people up to 11 September, 1973, and had to do with the enhancement of life for the majority of Chileans. At this point, responsibility was (illegally) assumed by the hegemony, USA-and-treasonable-Junta. (Beer 2009, 116–17)

The point here is that speculative cognition raises the level of self-reflexivity to the retrospective/prospective level of inter-temporal reflection (the meta-level referred to at the beginning of this chapter), and this depends not on the observer's singularity or circumstance (e.g., group membership and history, nationality or belonging, as in cultural relativism). Rather, as in Lévi-Strauss' account of Amerindian dual organizations that set themselves by establishing a fault line between North and South, "the very split between two 'relative' perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant": not the objective disposition of buildings across the North/South divide, "but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism that the inhabitants of the village are unable to symbolise ... or internalize. ... At this level, truth is no longer something that depends on the faithful reproduction of facts. We can note here the difference between (factual) truth and truthfulness."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps we can now answer the question about the Hegelian subject, who is he? He or she is the observer, the witness who, for instance, in testifying before a human rights tribunal (state or non-state, it makes no difference)

testifies to the atrocities not by giving a statement of pure facts (factual truth) but one that is truthful precisely because of its factual unreliability, confusion, or inconstancy. For “if the victim were able to report their traumatic and humiliating experience in a clear way, with all the data arranged in a consistent order of exposition, this very fact would make it suspicious. . . . The very weakness of the traumatised subject’s report bears witness to its truthfulness, since it signals that the content of the report has contaminated the very form in which it is reported” (Žižek, 2014, 105). As in the case of Lévi-Strauss’ account of the Amerindians’ law of exchange opposed to enjoyment without sharing (threatening war against a chieftain bent on accumulating all the women, warriors, goods, etc.) for the sake of freedom, here too weakness and trauma “account for an imbalance in social relations that prevents the community from stabilizing into a harmonious whole” (ibid.).

Furthermore, strictly speaking the experience of such an imbalance corresponds to the emergence of a point of accumulation and power within the community seen as a contingent misfortune, a past wrong, a wound, that when looked at from the perspective of the future can and will be corrected. Put otherwise, the utopian aspect of the report (that things can be different) is here animated and made practically attainable by its denouncing (or prophetic) aspect (things can and will be different).<sup>5</sup>

How does this (Hegelian) subject, placed among cannibals via Lévi-Strauss, go beyond the interplay between empirical and transcendental? The answer is this: by acknowledging that truthfulness (or in Lacanian parlance, “the Real”) does not lie in the transcendental kernel beyond or behind all our reports, but in the fault lines between them and the tectonic movements that occur therein from time to time. Concentrating on such fault lines, gaps, or weaknesses, critical (self)reflexivity brings out what is discarded, deselected, primordially repressed, squeezed out like shit, or dropped by the act of framing from and in the content. In doing so, one lets go of one’s ground to occupy the viewpoint of debris and shit rather than the vertical perspective that Benjamin famously attributed to the Angel of History. To sum up, if history is a sum of catastrophic tremors (predictable, manageable), then freedom is an earthquake. It is to radically invest, without hope of a return (i.e., *a fonds perdu*).

Why now? Not only because the charge of voraciousness has been brought about by and dominates postcritical thinking (poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, etc.) against the Hegelian Idea, structuralism and Marxism—including Althusserianism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the Lévi-Straussian anthropology of Amerindian perspectivism, as well as their political instantiations since the 1970s, of which Latin American revolutionary politics have been a prime example and inspiration to this day (e.g., the cases of Podemos and Syriza in southern Europe)—but because this is also



the very foundation of the contemporary “historical revisionism” that nowadays seeks to eradicate the revolutionary tradition from the record of history in general and from late twentieth- and early twenty-first century history in particular.

The latter is a trend that in terms of contemporary historical writing starts from the position taken by Ernst Nolte during the *Historikerstreit* debates in Germany about past wrongs and historical justice, as well as Francois Furet’s linking of the Stalinist purges to the “excesses” of the French Revolution. It ends with the current writings of finance historians and Anglophone imperial revivalists like Niall Ferguson or Paul Johnson, the idiosyncratic revisionism of human rights historians and the current vogue of “transitional justice” narratives, as well as the “conservative turn” in Latin American literature associated with Mario Vargas Llosa and the “gentrification” of the legacy of his generation, that of the radically invested “Boom” writers which included Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez (and their decisive participation on the II Russell Tribunal after the coup against Allende in Chile).

Crucially, on the one hand, the true motives of such revisionism have less to do with achieving a greater understanding of the past, and more with appealing to ideological needs of the global ruling classes in today’s climate. On the other hand, this revisionism is part and parcel of an attempt to reduce notions of justice in legal and human rights institutions to the mere protection of negative liberties. This is today’s version of mankind’s old dream of seizing and fixing “the fleeting moment when it was permissible to believe that ... one could enjoy without sharing,” denounced by Lévi-Strauss. Today, this dream takes the shape of an overblown account of the right to property, inscribed in current attempts at globalizing financial investor protections by linking the power to exercise democratic rights to (more or less radical) regulation to the liquidity of states.

This can be seen most clearly in the attempt to liquidate the global significance of the Chilean Revolution of the 1970s and its aftermath, more specifically the question of the present valuation of past injustice, as a crucial chapter on the history of the twentieth century as the century of permanent decolonization. Its precursor is the erasure from the historical record of the 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution as the decisive event in the sequence that also included France and the Americas, one which, arguably, was at the heart of Hegel’s efforts. Today’s instantiation would be the attempt to erase hope and close-off true risk by securing the inter-temporal relations of credit and debt between Northern Europe and Southern Europe in the context of Europe’s self-colonization and the revival of global imperialism. Specifically the case of the “nonnegotiations” between the EU and the Greek Syriza government (“a very European coup,” as Costas Douzinas put it recently) as well as the liquidation of Podemos’ “Latin American inspiration” in Spain.

## **HEGEL INVITED TO DINNER WITH THE AMERINDIANS: AGAINST THE LIQUIDATION OF THE FUTURE**

What is to be done? How can we leave behind us such an unfortunate state of affairs? My wager in this chapter has been this: to place Hegel among cannibals, among the Amerindians that inspired Lévi-Strauss' account of ground-zero institutions, those who spearheaded together with many others the Chilean Revolution of the 1970s and in 1972 linked up with the Cybersyn network, those who have been making a comeback in the Americas in the twenty-first century. Their aim has been all along to right the historical wrongs of the past. To do so, they have made use of older and newer forms of speculative thinking that go beyond the interplay between the empirical and the transcendental, and in that respect at least they have come down on the same side as Hegel's voracious idea.

Plainly speaking, these are speculative but concrete ways of seeing (both retrospective and prospective) and dealing with inter-temporal relations. This is the level that our fundamental market institutions now recognize as the domain of meta-data and financial speculation. But it's also the domain in which justice makes sense as an option, exercising our capacity to transform ourselves while transforming our environments, and to "design freedom" as one of the architects of Chile's Project Cybersyn put it back in the 1970s (Beer 1974).<sup>6</sup>

Consider how during the 1972 October Strike organized by truck owners and industrialists opposed to the Chilean Revolution, Cybersyn linked up with the network of social movements underpinning Salvador Allende's PU coalition. The social network was, in turn, impinged upon by Allende's use of public language (Guardiola-Rivera 2013, chapters 6–11). As a result of these interactions, the antagonism between the self-styled "owners of Chile" and the PU coalition was transformed, qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Cybersyn, Beat the Clock and other speculative strategies made possible a different approach to the question of the present valuation of past injustice: the ability to monitor which and where available "resources" could be called into use (by means of intelligent machines) in "real" time meant that observers, computers, and the systems they observed became part of a very different arrangement between humans and nonhumans. In this new arrangement nature could no longer be conceived as mere wealth-locked resource but also as an intergenerational topic of contention and antagonism. In turn, such antagonism was not merely interpersonal and intra-temporal but also inter-temporal.

If so, then a different perspective on justice would be required to deal with the temporal dimension of justice as well as a shift of standpoint in relation to normative orders of property—from the principle according to which

consent-based rules or contractual bargaining of endowment transfers leave both sides better off to a counter-principle covering cases of forced transfers in terms of liability/property rules and the constructive trust formula.

I believe something like that shift is necessary for us to devise a strategy to go beyond the “nonnegotiations” between the EU and Syriza, avoid the coup, and let Podemos be. The details of such a strategy would be the subject of another chapter. For now, let us finish by saying that the idea of placing Hegel among the savages would be nonsense, if not for the fact that he himself invited such a shift.

## NOTES

1. Crockett and Davis are here paraphrasing Žižek (2011, 224–25), in which he correctly argues that the true finesse of Hegel’s critique of Kant (and Anselm’s proof of God) isn’t that the latter are too abstract but, on the contrary, not abstract enough. For the true issue at stake here is the abstract nature of money as compared to God and as it behaves in capitalist markets.

2. This is the logic of oppositional determination or *gegensätzliche Bestimmung*, in which the universal genus encounters itself among its particular contingent species. As such, it is the very opposite of the unique and the unical inaugurated by Proclus the Successor in his theological appropriation of Plato, according to which the universal genus both encounters itself among the set of its particular species and subtracts itself, as the exception to that set that determines what counts as part of it.

3. See also Steyerl (2012).

4. S. Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 104.

5. See on this I Ellacuría quoted Alvarenga (2014, 95). Ellacuría’s remark refers to human rights advocacy.

6. See also Maturana and Varela (1980).

## Chapter Eight

# Creolizing Hegel's Theory of Tragedy

Greg A. Graham

My aim in this chapter is to present as an important feature of radical Africana thought the creolization of both Hegel's theory of tragedy and his utilization of this form of dramatic poetry to account for some dimensions of the experience of *Geist* on its path to absolute knowing. Creolization as I use the term below is meant to indicate the processes, not only of appropriation, accommodation, coquetting, and intermingling that are typically indicated in the study of the cultural, racial, and linguistic configurations that emerged in the New World from the encounter between people from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia. It is meant to indicate as well the necessary mutual transformation and readjusting of each element that contributes to the emergence of the distinctly new, distinctly *creole* phenomenon which comes upon the scene, arising out of the demands brought to bear by the unique set of circumstances which necessitated this particular type of amalgamation to begin with. It is precisely this process of creolization that is here demonstrated as a feature of the radical Africana tradition's engagement with Hegel.

The creolization of Hegel's theory of ancient tragedy and of his employ of it as a heuristic device in his account of *Geist* are presented as an important dimension of radical Africana political thought, mainly that of the Martiniquan thinker Frantz Fanon. The label "radical Africana thought" is utilized to indicate a specific branch of transformative philosophical engagement that concerns itself with the experience of Africana peoples as they appear on the historical stage in such grand sagas as slavery, colonialism, and capitalist development. Those subjects are lifted in such engagements from the margins and into the center of philosophical inquiry, a move of vital importance to the ongoing effort of thinkers from the global south to shift the longstanding geography of reason that underpins traditional philosophical engagement. In view of the plight of the subjects of their inquiry, radical

Africana thinkers like Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and Frantz Fanon raise invariably the question of what is to be done, to which they posit radical, transformative answers. They thus wade unavoidably into the realm of politics.

Hegel's theory of ancient tragedy is posited here as furnishing for the radical Africana tradition an important hermeneutic filter through which the tensions inherent in the social transition from colonial to postcolonial societies in Africa and the Diaspora, as well as in the struggle to make of those states, once decolonized, entities that accord with the original, foundational bid for human freedom and dignity that ushered them into being, are best understood. The Hegelian account of tragedy is presented as a component of his broader theory of Aesthetics, and also as providing an important framework for the expression of those moments of impasse in the development of *Geist* that are preludes to the emergence of higher, more refined forms of knowing as it tends toward absolute knowledge. The process of dialectical overcoming at the center of this movement is read as an inherently tragic affair.

I will endeavor to show how Frantz Fanon, in particular, appropriates and transforms Hegel's theory of tragedy in his formulation of the conflict between native and settler that ushers the postcolonial state into existence. The Manichean reality of the colonial situation means, however, that the ethical substance central to Hegel's account of tragedy is absent from the tragic collision between colonizer and colonized. What we are presented with in the place of the ethical claims as Hegel formulates them for tragedy are competing, explicitly political, claims in relation to the legitimacy of the colonial situation.

I aim to show as well how Fanon's creolization of Hegel's deployment of tragedy enhances our understanding of his creolization of Rousseau's notion of the *general will*. We are able to better understand the distinction between Rousseau's formulation and Fanon's concept of national consciousness if we take into account the matter of the tragic reversals that follow in the wake of political experience on the part of the postcolonial subject. Such experience contributes to higher forms of knowing which supersede the limited parochial knowledge of immediacy that thrives at the onset of the fight for national liberation and manages to entrench itself in the life of the newly independent state under the guise of nationalism.

## CREOLIZATION IN CONTEXT

Jane Gordon's recent exploration of the ways in which Fanon can be read as creolizing Rousseau's concept of the *general will* in his formulation of the idea of *national consciousness* in *The Wretched of the Earth* provides a

theoretical frame for the application of the concept here in relation to Hegel (Gordon 2014). Of importance to her articulation of the concept creolization are the aforementioned mutual shifts, adjustments, and transformations demanded of the forces that must come into the process that generates the sort of amalgam befitting the label *creole*. Creolization as such seeks to be more than mere coexistence and accommodation. It tends toward a higher order of synthesis that is in my view reflected in Hegel's account of dialectical transformation. For its part, Hegel's account of the dialectical process, with its collision, transformation, and synthesis, resonates as such with the process whereby things uniquely *creole* are brought into existence.

Gordon indicates mainly two ways in which creolization proves itself useful for political theory. It does so firstly as an approach or disposition toward politics and secondly as methodology. She argues first for creolization as an approach to politics, specifically to politics in contexts marked by difference; the difference wrought by competing interests and agendas. In such circumstances politics approached with the goal of creolization in mind tends eventually toward the harmony and cohesion implicit in the general will. To quote Gordon at length:

I am using creolization and creolizing to name a particular approach to politics and to the engagement and construction of political ideas. In historical and social scientific literatures, creolization has referred to distinctive ways in which opposed, unequal groups forged mutually instantiating practices in contexts of radical historical rupture, ones through which people from elsewhere become indigenous to what had recently been foreign places by breaking with the trajectories that their previous collective genealogies would have anticipated. Although the progressive outcomes of such processes were in no sense assured, because creolization generally focuses on collective ends beyond those of basic coexistence and toleration, it draws attention to the mutual transformation involved in molding that which emerges as politically shared. (2014, 2–3)

This filtering of democratic decision making for the general will understood as a collective, mutual interest that forwards the well-being of the political community as whole, and not the particular wills of isolated groups and individuals, is indeed a salient feature also of Frantz Fanon's formulation of the idea of national consciousness, as Gordon observes. National consciousness as a shared awareness of the collective interest of the political community, the latter recognized for its inherent diversity of identities, interests, and opinions, stands in contrast to narrowly conceived, parochial nationalism, for Fanon. Nationalism as an absolutist, totalizing articulation of the character of the politics and culture of the political community tends toward the overcoming of the sort of diversity that makes for a vibrant body politic and for healthy democratic participation. It stresses conformity and compliance as

essential to the nationalist agenda as it might be defined at a given moment by ascendant interests, while suppressing in its wake the differences and particularities that temper the tendency toward a flawed understanding of the political community as monolithic as its makeup.

The relationship between Rousseau's concept of the general will and Fanon's concept of national consciousness becomes such that the latter is read by Gordon as the operationalization of the former. That is, Fanon's formulation of the idea of national consciousness becomes in this sense the actualization of Rousseau's idea of the general will, its application to the struggles and lived realities of human beings who are not often considered in Western political thought.

It is in this general mold that I raise the matter of what becomes of Hegel's theory of tragedy when it is employed as heuristic device to the circumstances of the struggle of human beings who fell largely outside the purview of his account of the march of Spirit.

## HEGEL'S AESTHETICS

As a component of his theory of aesthetics, Hegel's theory of tragedy accords with the guiding principles that inform his broader philosophy. His theory of tragedy, and of ancient tragedy in particular, is marked as such by the theme of dialectical overcoming toward the realization of Absolute Spirit. A brief account of Hegel's aesthetics is necessary in order to put into context his theory of tragedy and to elucidate the ways in which it intertwines with the aspects of his philosophy relevant to the account of creolization that concerns us here.

Of the modes of expression of Absolute *Geist*, art is the lowest in Hegel's schema. It is superseded by Religion, which is itself superseded by Philosophy (the highest mode of the expression of *Geist*). This schema, with Philosophy as the chief medium through which *Geist* is most adequately expressed and grasped by consciousness, reflects the evolution of a system of thought that had undergone significant transformation leading up to Hegel's Berlin years, the context for his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (Hegel 1975a). Theodore George indicates where, even after Hegel's system assumed its determinate shape with his *Phenomenology*, his devotion to conceptual language as the framework most suitable for the expression of his speculative unity was far from resolute (George 2006). The specter of poetry, and in particular tragic poetry, loomed over his quest for the vessel most apt for exploring and giving proper expression to the twists, turns, and contradictions as they emerge and are overcome in the experience of *Geist*. The younger Hegel, caught in the currents of the romanticism that had swept his peers, had, after all, flirted with



the notion that the language of poetry was that most capable of giving expression to the short intricate combinations that speculative philosophical endeavors gave rise to (George 2006, 8–13). It is not surprising then that, although art is the least of the means through which Absolute *Geist* is expressed in his system, dramatic poetry, as a subset thereof, should be the form that was, for Hegel, closest to philosophy.

“Absolute Spirit,” as Derek Baker describes it, “is the consciousness that comprehends the reconciliation of freedom and necessity, ideal and real, individuals and the social world” (Baker 2009, 70).<sup>1</sup> At the level of politics and social life Subjective *Geist*, as individual consciousness, comes into awareness of the rational content of Objective *Geist* as it takes shape in the political association. The individual recognizes his place in the broader society that stands as an extension of his rational subjectivity and its inherent aspiration for freedom. A corresponding development and culmination takes place in the realm of aesthetics such that the artistic endeavors of human beings develop along a trajectory that culminates in art’s more refined form. At that stage, the tension between the spiritual substance yearning for expression in artistic enterprises is finally resolved in relation to sensuous matter that must be shaped to offer it expression. “The more that works of art excel in true beauty of presentation,” says Hegel, “the more profound is the inner truth of their content and thought” (1886, 142). It is therefore at the stage of what he designates *Romantic* art that we find beauty at its fullest, and where we encounter most forcefully that *truth*, “that the work of art has the vocation of revealing.” To quote Hegel at length:

[A]rt has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape, of representing the reconciled antithesis just described, and therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation. For other objects, such as instruction, purification, improvement, pecuniary gain, endeavor after fame and honour, have nothing to do with the work of art as such, and do not determine its conception. (1886, 105–6)<sup>2</sup>

Here art achieves the highest resolution of the tension internal to it in its development as a characteristically human practice. Romantic art also comes to reflect the most refined grade of the resolution of the tensions by which *Geist* is beset in its development. This final resolution of form and content in Hegel’s aesthetics, beauty in the form of the Ideal, comes more forthrightly upon the scene when in tandem with the wider spiritual growth of the age in which the artistic mind grasps the necessity that the spiritual content retreat inward into itself from sensuous, plastic mediums of expression. The aim at this stage is no longer that those mediums embody the spiritual content. *Geist* comes to the awareness that the vastness and depth of its content is only adequately

contained within itself. The journey to this point and its implications for the place of artistic expression in Hegel's system are instructive.

Western art up to the nineteenth century featured for Hegel *Symbolic*, *Classical*, and *Romantic* periods of development, each with a form of artistic expression characteristic to it. Additionally, each form of art undergoes what might be described as its symbolic, classical, and romantic stages. We find reflected at each stage in this sequential order a noticeable increase in the efficiency with which human beings were able to capture and convey that permanent, enduring, rational force with which the totality of existence was saturated. At each stage of development, we come to a more substantial representation and reflection of Absolute *Geist* in the work of art. At the *Symbolic* stage, the medium of expression employed can scarcely give proper representation to vague conception that the human mind has of *Geist* at that particular moment in the development of consciousness (1886, 160–61).<sup>3</sup> Hegel describes the disconnect between content and form at this stage of artistic development as one in which *Geist* maintains a “fugitive” status in relation to the sensuous medium of expression (Hegel 1886, 155). Symbolic art reaches its apex with architecture as its quintessential form.

The *Classical* period which follows is able to more effectively resolve the tension between the material object being acted upon and that force of which the artist is driven to offer expression. Sculpture in Hegel's schema becomes the characteristically classic form of artistic expression. At this stage it is fitting that the principal subject of classical art becomes the ideal human form. The human form alone in nature captures the Idea in its concrete actualization whereupon it has become particularized and determinate. “This shape, with which the Idea as spiritual—as individually determinate spirituality—invests itself when manifested as a temporal phenomenon, is the *human form*,” says Hegel (1886, 149). The tendency toward perfect representation of the human figure reflects that the heightened awareness of the nature of *Geist* on the part of the artistic mind of the era has come into harmony with the means of its representation. As *Geist* comes further into awareness of itself, the disjoint between form and content idiosyncratic of the symbolic moment reemerges. It happens that their resolution was only a passing phase. Classical art, says Hegel, “attained the highest excellence, of which the sensuous embodiment of art is capable; and if it is in any way defective, the defect is in art as whole, i.e. in the limitation of its sphere” (1886, 151). In response to this inherent defect, romantic art comes upon the scene distinguished by forms of artistic expression that overcome the limitations that the use of three-dimensional objects place upon the representation of the divine. Of the characteristically romantic forms of artistic expression, Hegel identifies three. Painting, music, and poetry hold in common that as romantic forms they facilitate the movement away from the sensuous form toward *Geist* as ultimately the vessel best

suited for its own expression. It becomes in this sense the primary canvass for its own representation. And thus, although in each instance the sensuous form remains a necessary avenue to the spiritual content, the artistic mind in the romantic period does not seek to imbue such objects with spiritual content *per se*. It seeks instead to signal and evoke through these forms the infinite depths of spiritual content and experience.

Of the three forms of Romantic art, it is poetry that is the most fully immersed in the bid to divest the sensuous form of its content. Poetry of all the quintessentially romantic arts relies on mind, on the form of the human imagination, to convey the infinite possibilities that the artist might intend. Here, especially in its dramatic form,<sup>4</sup> the combination of the written or spoken word with music conjures shape and form without the extent of mediation on the part of sensuous material that is necessary in sculpture, for example. Given the manner that it directly accesses the human imagination, poetry is according to Hegel the form of artistic expression closest to philosophy as a medium in which Absolute Spirit finds expression and sound representation. It is in fact as dramatic poetry that romantic art as a whole reaches the zenith of its ability to facilitate and offer expression to the content of *Geist* as shaped by its journey of experience. After this point, according to the mature Hegel, art can go no further in this endeavor and the torch must be taken up by philosophy. He ventures there to suggest what some have interpreted to be the end of art. It no longer provides the satisfaction of spiritual needs that it catered to during its symbolic and classical stages precisely because the nature of those needs have been transformed (Hegel 1975a, 10–11). In the modern age, according to Hegel, art, “considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place” (Hegel 1886, 11). The rise of philosophy and of philosophical reflections upon art did not however mean that artistic production should grind to a screeching halt. In keeping with the strictly Hegelian reading of the famous End-of-Art thesis that had moved Gregory Markus and before him Arthur Danto suggest that, insofar as it was concerned mainly with the highest vocation of art as Hegel identified it, the thesis was “consistent with art, and even great art, continuing to be made” (Danto 1999).<sup>5</sup>

### HEGEL'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY

As the preeminent form of dramatic poetry, Tragedy's appeal for Hegel appears twofold. For the younger and more methodologically adventurous Hegel, it represented a world of infinite possibilities for himself and his peers

as they looked to poetry for the language and the unifying framework with which to express the speculative unity they aimed for following Kant. With the mature Hegel, such radical aspirations became tempered and, like the larger body of artistic endeavors taken as a whole, poetry becomes relegated to a mode of pursuing and offering expression to the absolute that is subordinate to philosophy. Conceptual language becomes for Hegel the ideal means of articulating the speculative unity. This was not the end of the matter, however, as George is keen to point out. The language and imagery of tragic poetry contends for space in the account of the speculative unity that issues from the mature Hegel starting with the 1807 publication of the *Phenomenology*. Far more than a nostalgic residue of his youthful intellectual endeavors, the persistence of tragedy as a theme in this particular work arises from a deliberate effort to give full account of the misadventures of spirit, argues George. Since it is his focus on the *experience* of *Geist* that furnishes Hegel's decisive contribution to our understanding of the absolute and how we arrive at the speculative unity whereby it is grasped in its totality, a thorough account of twists and turns of that experience is in order. Such an account in George's estimation had to be one that brought into focus, for evaluation and proper contextualization, the noteworthy fissures and missteps that spirit ventured upon along its journey of self-discovery. As a foil for Hegel's use of the language of the concept to show the rational march of the speculative unity, that of tragedy is utilized, according to George, "as an indispensable voice of incommensurable differences, disunity, confusion and strife" (2006, 28). In the absence of this the attempt to give a thorough account of experience would ring hollow. George's reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and of his account of the historical content of absolute knowing is therefore one that recognizes the important role that finitude in the shape of "incommensurability, strife, confusion and difference" (2006, 17) plays in conditioning the final product that is the speculative unity. The doubt that issues from experience brings us into awareness of the limited control we have over the conditions under which we come into knowledge. Trauma is inflicted thereby upon spirit and each instance of that realization comprises a moment of despair that Hegel accounts for through the hermeneutics of tragedy.

Like the noteworthy effort of Aristotle before him, Hegel's theory of tragedy discerns and highlights the important, therapeutic dimensions of the art form. Recall that in his *Poetics* Aristotle forwards as critical to tragedy the cathartic effect it has upon its audience. By viewing tragedy, the audience is able to see objectively and hence expunge those emotions that do not serve the interest of the community. We encounter a similarly therapeutic reading from Hegel, for whom the social function of tragedy comports with that which he designates for artistic endeavors in general. The difference between the two philosophical accounts of tragedy in this particular respect lies with

the affliction diagnosed in each instance. Aristotle singles out for attention the emotions of fear and pity, the proliferation of which we must assume are inimical to the interest of the body politic. Hegel by contrast singles out the deep yearning of *Geist* in its subjective form to make sense of its objective reality first as nature, and then as the reality that it creates in the shape of culture and social life. It is the limited, at times one-sided view of reality that issues from this unreconciled striving which is overcome and put into perspective for those who experience tragic drama. Tragedy as artistic presentation becomes in this sense a therapeutic recounting of the experience of *Geist* as it passes from limited to higher forms of being and knowing. The passage is wrought with suffering, agony, and despair for those directly involved and in immediate proximity to the collision either between substantive one-sided perspectives radically opposed to each other in the social world or between similarly opposed and equally justifiable ethical claims within a single subject. Modern tragedy tends to be of the latter sort, and ancient tragedy of the former.

The collision at the heart Hegel's theory of tragedy in the form of this sort of ethical impasse and its eventual resolution is particularly important for the current account of the ways in which Hegel is creolized in radical Africana thought. The instance of ancient tragedy that is emblematic of this sort of collision for him is, as he declares it, the *Antigone* of Sophocles. In Hegel's famous declaration,

Among all the fine creations of the ancient and modern world – and I am acquainted with pretty nearly everything in such a class, and one ought to know it, and it is quite possible – the “*Antigone*” of Sophocles is *from this point of view* in my judgment the most excellent and satisfying work of art. (1920, 324)

The point of view in question is of course that of tragedies in which, “it is the onesidedness of the pathos which constitutes the real basis of collisions” (1920, 323). As an instance of such embodiment of the pathos by individuals the *Antigone* represents for Hegel “one of the most sublime and in every respect most excellent works of art of all time,” as he lauds it further in his *Aesthetics* (1975a, 464). “Everything in this tragedy is logical,” he declares, “the public law of the state is set in conflict over against inner family love and duty to a brother; the woman, Antigone, has the family interest as her ‘pathos’, Creon, the man, has the welfare of the community as his” (ibid., emphasis mine).<sup>6</sup> Being thus diametrically opposed owing to the manner in which each embodies their respective pathos, both Antigone and Creon tumble toward irreparable loss and tragic despair. The individual must be sacrificed if the pathos they entail is to be released from the isolation wrought by this one-sidedness, Hegel tells us (1920, 323).<sup>7</sup> In addition to the character of the

opposition at stake in tragedy, its other defining aspect in his formulation is the matter of its resolution. And thus:

The final result, then, of the development of tragedy conducts us to this issue and only this, namely, that the twofold vindication of the mutually conflicting aspects are no doubt retained, but the *onesided* mode under which they were maintained is cancelled, and the undisturbed ideal harmony brings back again that condition of the chorus, which attributes without reserve equal honour to all the gods. The true course of dramatic development consists in the annulment of *contradictions* viewed as such, in the reconciliation of the forces of human action, which alternately strive to negate each other in their conflict. (1920, 321)

We have then from the foregoing two main features of Hegel's theory of tragedy. These are, namely, the tragic collision at the center of tragedy as artistic representation and the eventual resolution of that contradiction. To demonstrate how his theory of tragedy is creolized in radical Africana thought it is necessary to shift our focus away from tragedy as art and once again toward the matter of the dimensions of spiritual experience that it brings into view. The survey of the experiences through which *Geist* comes into awareness of itself reveals moments of crisis that issue from the finitude of spirit in the form of human subjectivity. In those moments spirit undergoes the agony of coming to terms with its limitations and eventually transcending them in its growth. Hegel grants expression to this dimension of experience by using the language of tragedy. I submit that in his creolization of Hegel's theory of tragedy, Fanon, as my main example of radical Africana thought, employs tragedy in the first instance to throw into relief the rupture into the sacred spaces of Western modernity that the advent of the colonial subject into citizenship through nationhood represents. The language and imagery of tragedy in *The Wretched of the Earth* as such interrupts the cocksure narrative flow of Manicheanism at the local level in colonial society. It disrupts in addition the corresponding configuration that obtains at the broader global systemic level, the latter being informed as well by Manichean logic. In the second instance the hermeneutics of tragedy in *WE* elucidates the ways in which the totalizing discourse of nationalism, as Fanon describes it, is offset by the experience of postcolonial subjects who thereby attain the heightened awareness that contributes toward what he has labeled *national consciousness*.

### THE RADICAL AFRICANA TRADITION AND HEGEL'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY

Fanon's engagement with the *Phenomenology* in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986, hereafter *PN*) sets the stage for the radical deviations he makes

subsequently from Hegel as he formulates his own theory of social change specific to the needs of the Third World in *WE*. Near the end of *PN*, after Fanon has chronicled what Lewis Gordon has described as a litany of failures on the part of the colonized, racialized subject to secure recognition of his/her humanity in the colonizing white gaze, he raises for consideration a major treatise on the matter of recognition: namely, that of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In Hegel's allegory both master and slave are driven by the desire for recognition that informed their initial encounter. This drive is intrinsically a human one. Through it, consciousness shows itself capable of desiring something beyond the fulfillment of the simple needs of nature. *Consciousness* seeks affirmation of itself as existing beyond the immediacy of the natural state through which man is linked to the world of animals and things. This mediation into a human form of existing can be attained only by putting one's very existence on the line, by venturing beyond the impulse for self-preservation in relation to another individual's desire for recognition as *consciousness*. For Hegel, therefore, the original relation that ushers in a distinctly human world is marked by the inequality of a master who secures mediation by compelling his slave who he has overcome in mortal struggle to recognize him as other than natural consciousness. The slave in Hegel's allegory comes eventually to be recognized in turn as self-consciousness, partly through applying himself with skill, discipline, and diligence to his work. Says Hegel of the slave,

in fear, the being-for-self is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that the being-for-self belongs to him, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right. . . . Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own. (1977, 118–19)

Fanon is compelled by the circumstances of the colonial situation to point out that this dialectic of recognition which Hegel outlines in his *Phenomenology* collapses when it comes to the plight of the colonized subject. In the relationship between native and settler what the latter desires from the former to begin with is not recognition but work (Fanon 1986, 221–22). There is hence a failure of the dialectics of recognition in this particular instance which sets the stage for Fanon's subsequent engagement with Hegel. He ventures from this understanding at the close of *PN* to theorize in *WE* what Ato Sekyi-Otu has described as “[a]n *antidialectic* of absolute difference and total opposition—that is to say, a relationship of ‘pure violence’” (1996, 25).<sup>8</sup> The dialectic of recognition that might have otherwise made ethical relations possible between native and settler crumbles beneath the material demands



of the colonial situation and its Manichean superstructure. Thus arises the circumstances under which the colonized subject must emerge onto the historical stage in illicit, transgressive fashion. Fanon depicts these circumstances in the language of tragedy. Equally tragic, as we shall see, are the ramifications for postcolonial society that come in their wake.

In the opening chapter of *WE* ("Concerning Violence"), Fanon's reader comes upon a stage set for the kind of tragedy Hegel suggested was most pleasing to the aesthetic sense with an eye for the resolution of ethical collisions. There, Fanon uses the lexicon of tragedy initially to describe the social manifestations of the divide that Manicheanism entails. His juxtaposition not only of the contrasting material conditions of the native and settler but also of their colliding world views harkens to Hegel's theory of tragedy, but by way of Karl Marx. To this extent the opening stages of "Concerning Violence" bear affinity with C.L.R. James' staging of the eve of the Haitian Revolution in *The Black Jacobins* (1989b). Both instances of radical Africana thought appear to mirror the stark social divide that Marx and Engels present as a feature of capitalist society on the threshold of revolution in *The Communist Manifesto*. Consequently, the dialectic of confrontation between the two main social classes in each instance of radical Africana thought—between native and settler in the case of Fanon, and between master and slave in the case of James—falls within the Marxian tradition of problematizing Hegel's account of the resolution of social contradictions in his master-slaver dialectic. All three instances of revolutionary writing represent the appropriation of aspects of Hegel's theory of tragedy to compensate for perceived deficiencies in his dialectic of recognition that make it unsuited for the task of giving account of capitalist exploitation and conceiving of radical ventures away from it.

For their part, James' and Fanon's deviation from Marx lies with the Manicheanism that informs the preeminent class contradiction in the worlds of slavery and of colonial domination. As a consequence of it, Fanon highlights how the account that must be given of the anti-colonial struggle requires the expansion of Marxist categories in some instances and deviations from them in others. "When you examine the close quarters of the colonial context," says Fanon, as he isolates the precise feature that sets the social compartmentalization unique to colonialism apart,

it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.

Everything up to and including the very nature of precapitalist society, so well explained by Marx, must here be thought out again. (1963, 40)

Manicheanism places extreme strain upon the attempts to account for the colonial world using Marxist categories of analysis. This is precisely because Manicheanism entails the notion of the racially exclusive embodiment of human subjectivity. The potential for the recognition of subjectivity implicit for Hegel's bondsman, and even for Marx's proletariat, is nowhere to be found in the native according to Manichean logic.

When Fanon gestures therefore at the classic setup for a tragic collision of the Hegelian sort, he must immediately posit Aristotle as a corrective.

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. They two zones are opposed but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. (Fanon 1963, 38–39)

It follows from this that, for colonialism to come to an end, the native and settler must face each other both as "protagonists" in what Fanon describes as, "a murderous and decisive struggle" (1963, 37). Our protagonists are each self-assured in the validity of their competing claims regarding the legitimacy of the colonial situation. From the native's point of view, colonialism is a dehumanizing, exploitative impediment in the way of the pursuit of his latent nationalist imperatives. In the settler's view there can be no such possibility and no imperatives higher than that of his personal material interest and social prestige. The backdrop is thus set for one of the more tragic episodes of social drama in modern times. Decolonization, perceived through the eyes of the native as "the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men," comes upon the scene to violently sweep the settler and with him the colonial situation away into the dustbin of history (Fanon 1963, 35). Such mediation through which order is restored to the world in the gaze of immediate knowledge is always the stuff of terror, as Lewis Gordon has observed. The tragic lesson that generally issues amidst the communal suffering that comes with tragedy, according to him, "is that setting things 'right,' thereby setting the community right, calls for violent intervention—horrible interventions" (1995, 70).

However, the tragic collision that follows the Manichean configuration that Fanon presents drawing on Hegel's theory elicits suffering for the formerly colonized beyond their mass graves, their own bloodstained hands, and the effective suspension of their humanity and compassion necessary to defeat the colonizer. Their extended suffering comes in the form of the ramifications of

the Manichean logic they are compelled to employ in conceptualizing, articulating, and effecting the vision of a world without colonialism. Emerging from the vestiges of colonial domination the worldview of the formerly colonized is tainted by the limiting oversimplification of Manichean thinking as the framework for immediate knowledge—that awareness of the world and their place in it that obtains on the eve of independence. It is at once restricting, insofar as it is but the opening along the path to more complex understandings, and at the same time liberating, given its political import as a necessary precondition for revolutionary action. Ultimately, “the tragedy of the colonial and racist situation,” says Lewis Gordon, “is the price that has to be paid for the emergence of such a society. For if the master’s dirty values are accepted as a source of liberation, then no slave can be free without getting his hands dirty” (1995, 80). As with the struggle against slavery, and for national independence, nation-building in the aftermath of colonial domination is a jaded and messy endeavor. Both Fanon’s *Wretched* and James’ *Black Jacobins* become at once therefore homages to the triumph of the human spirit over projects geared toward its negation, and at the same time admonitions against the conceptual baggage of Manichean thinking. They chronicle how far the tragedy of the postcolonial situation has at its roots the employ of Manichean logic in the fight for national liberation. The haunting residue of this manner of proceeding persists in the day-to-day operation of stately affairs. Though spurned with much zeal by the formerly colonized, the colonial world did constitute an active, imprinting social reality the vestiges of which are not so readily cast off in the aftermath of struggle.

The other salient dimension of the creolization of Hegel’s theory of tragedy in *WE* is linked to the matter of reversal as a feature of the tragic hermeneutics that George identifies in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel, he points out, borrows this concept from Aristotle’s reflections on tragedy to show “that for naïve consciousness, at least, experience brings us face to face with a form of finitude that bespeaks the tenuousness of even our deepest beliefs about ourselves and our world, and thus exposes the precariousness and vulnerability of human affairs” (George 2006, 30). Fanon’s *WE* similarly abounds with tragic reversals of a sort akin to this account of experience. In *WE*, the formerly colonized are brought repeatedly to the realization of the flawed, naïve political understanding they held in the throes of the struggle for national independence. Consciousness in *WE* undertakes a path of development similar to that of *Geist* in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Sekyi-Otu makes the compelling case for reading both texts against each other, describing his own interpretative procedure in Fanon’s *Dialectic of Experience* as one that while “treating *The Wretched of the Earth* as the pivotal text, reads Fanon’s discourse as coqueting with Hegel” (1996, 24). As such *WE* should be read in a dialectical fashion for which *truth* lies not in the initial moment

that we encounter the colonized consciousness at the outset of "Concerning Violence" but in the totality of the movement from that immediate knowledge to what Fanon labels *national consciousness*.

In light of Fanon's use of dialectics as method Sekyi-Otu, like other recent Fanon scholars such as Lewis Gordon and Nigel Gibson, admonishes against reading the speech acts and moments meant to depict consciousness in the immediacy of the struggle for national independence as definitive proclamations of Fanon's own positions on important matters.<sup>9</sup> Gordon, for instance, has shown where this tendency was an unfortunate feature of first-wave Fanon scholarship.<sup>10</sup> It endured as a feature also of feminist and postmodern projects that offered up reductive and oftentimes specious readings of Fanon.<sup>11</sup> What is missed in this manner of proceeding which neglects the dialectical nature of Fanon's text is the process whereby the limited form of consciousness indicated in the early stages of the *Wretched of the Earth* is transformed through the lived experience of the formerly colonized subjects. "[T]he mission of Fanon's dialectical narrative," says Sekyi-Otu, "is to stage the upsurge of richer modes of reasoning, judging, and acting from the limiting albeit legitimate constraints of 'immediate experience'" (1996, 36). To this extent Fanon's narrative should be recognized for the "intertextual criticism" it entails. Therein, what are seemingly definitive truth claims of a given moment later come into serious question.

It happens therefore that by the time the reader gets to "The Misadventures of National Consciousness," the certainty of the truth claims that marked "Concerning Violence," that famous account of the immediate knowledge that shapes anti-colonial struggle, buckles under the weight of the political experience of the formerly colonized. Decolonization, for instance, ceases to be "quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" (Fanon 1963, 35). The formerly colonized are compelled instead, in the wake of experience, to comprehend in it all its arduous complexity as an ongoing process that requires vigilance to keep neocolonialism at bay. Enlightenment of this sort moves the newly formed body politic ever further away from those tenacious Manichean ways of perceiving reality and of engaging it at the level of political action.

Fanon's use of the language of tragedy in this instance, specifically the fact that he casts the transformations in political awareness of the postcolonial subject in the image of tragic reversals, at once resonates with Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and at the same time exposes its limitations when the saga of the struggle for true decolonization is considered. Sekyi-Otu notes where the engine behind the transformation in consciousness that Fanon gives account of is experience, but not in the sense of the cosmic, reflexive gaze of spirit upon itself along the path to absolute knowing that one finds in Hegel. For Hegel's dialectic, according to Sekyi-Otu's reading, experience understood

as the intermediary between a predetermined state of absolute knowing and ordinary consciousness is an affair largely internal to *Geist*. Drawing on Heidegger, he postulates that

Because Hegelian dialectic is an operation which “consciousness exercises on itself,” it is possible in retrospect to see the necessity by virtue of which consciousness would come to grasp the immemorial procession of notional constellations as manifestations of “its own essence,” and in so doing “signify the nature of absolute knowing itself.” (Sekyi-Otu 1996, 29)

By contrast, experience, for Fanon, is by virtue of the circumstances that concern him, resolutely political. The collisions and contradictions on the way to enlightenment for the formerly colonized subject are located in concrete historical episodes of conquest, enslavement, and colonialism. Since Fanon’s account of their transition is shaped by the contingencies of actual experience, his dialectic must of necessity be more open ended and other than the seemingly self-assured, predetermined Hegelian account of the path to the Absolute. Thus, according to Sekyi-Otu, Fanon’s narrative reports those “critical moments in the journey of experience when the very dialectical enlightenment achieved by the colonized subject in revolt eventuates not in the comedy of self-recognition and absolute knowledge, but rather in the disclosure of yet more tangled manifestations of the problems of freedom and community” (1996, 29). Absent from Fanon’s dialectic is the sense of finality implicit in the idea of Absolute knowing.

Stated in the language of WE therefore, the journey along the path to more refined, mediated forms of knowing for the colonized subject is a movement away from the immediacy of Manichean thinking and toward *national consciousness* for the emergent body politic as a whole. This journey is not without peril, however, as Hegel’s *Phenomenology* endeavors to show. These moments of impasse in the march of Spirit are the crux of what is reflected in tragedy for him. By Fanon’s account, as far as the movement from nationalism to national consciousness is concerned, from political judgment reflective of immediate knowledge to that consistent with more heightened forms knowing, the tragedy of dialectical transition from the former to the latter, in effect the latter’s retardation, becomes enmeshed in the lived reality of the formerly colonized. Tragedy (in this sense, the tragic struggle on the part of the national consciousness to find avenues of expression) becomes part and parcel of political experience of the community. As an expression of this, “The Misadventures of National Consciousness” tells us of the failure of the national bourgeoisie to foster its realization following the attainment of formal independence and of the “tragic mishaps” that ooze from this festering. The result, according to Fanon, is that

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. The faults that we find in it are quite sufficient explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young and independent nations, the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state. These are the cracks in the edifice which show the process of retrogression, that is so harmful and prejudicial to national effort and national unity. (1963, 148)

One sees here the substitution of meaningful democratic engagement, and with it the bid to obtain and affect the expressed interest of the political community as a whole, for parochial, reactionary alternatives that posit themselves as absolute under the shroud of *the national interest*.

To be sure, in dialectical fashion typical of Fanon's method this particular development in the drama is presaged in the moment of immediacy. Against the pressing demands for clarification of aims and objectives the leadership of the anti-colonial movement upchucks debilitating Manichean dogma that effectively delegitimizes dissent and critical interrogation. At the height of struggle the nationalist imperative is heralded as not merely ontologically prior to all others but as the invalidation of them all as well. We see here the indigested totalizing ethos of the original Manicheanism of the colonial situation turned upon its head in order that "the last shall be first" (Fanon 1963, 46).

Before this sorry state of affairs comes about, before the nationalist sentiment so critical to the struggle for decolonization becomes a morbid shadow of itself, there is a telling moment in which the aspiring nation gives expression to itself in the decision to overcome the colonial situation. That key moment of unanimity that provides the basis upon which the political community imagined could be founded is an initial expression of *national consciousness*. From this initial moment of unanimity *national consciousness* proceeds thenceforth in a fragile state and in constant need of resuscitation. In this and other respects it bears striking similarity to what Jean Jacques Rousseau meant to indicate by the *general will*. Another way of stating the matter of travails that befall national consciousness in the post-independence period then would be that with the triumph of parochial nationalism in the form of ethnic and class interests over a unifying and inclusive national consciousness there is a tragic miscarriage of something akin to what Jean Jacques Rousseau described in *On the Social Contract* as the *general will*.<sup>12</sup>

In exploring the relationship between the two concepts Jane Gordon, in *Creolizing Political Theory*, forwards the notion of creolization as useful for understanding the relationship between Rousseau's *general will* and Fanon's

idea of *national consciousness* (Gordon 2014). By way of this descriptive Gordon draws attention to how canonical political thought is transformed and gives birth to new molds when called upon to elucidate aspects of political experience in geographies and political realities that originally fell outside of their purview. More specifically, creolizing Rousseau's thought in the way that Fanon does with the concept of *national consciousness* involves, in Gordon's estimation, "the repositioning of ideas in Rousseau to think through and make sense of the political situation in the Caribbean and then North Africa in a blend that produces something simultaneously recognizable and wholly new" (2014, 163). That theoretical novelty which comes in the wake of creolization of the sort is made necessary by the unique demands of the socioeconomic and political circumstances to which an instance of canonical thought is applied.

Fanon's grafting of Rousseau's formulation over the fluxional and shifting contours of postcolonial nation building exposes a principal limitation of the latter's thinking and in the same breath attempts to overcome it. Rousseau's postulation of the path to legitimate governance was "richest in the philosophical and theoretical mode" (quoted in Gordon 2014, 127). Gordon suggests:

They articulated a regulative ideal through which we might critically evaluate existing regimes to articulate directions that would make them less imperfect. Fanon's political theory, by contrast, is embedded in and emerges directly out of describing the stages of trying to forge just such a transition. He thereby deepens and radicalizes Rousseau's insights, underscoring their irredeemably political dimensions. (ibid.)

The distinction between Rousseau's general will and Fanon's notion of national consciousness, as the formerly colonized stumble their way over obstacles and through impediments in their way to it, lies in the matter of experience. Our understanding of Fanon's creolization of Rousseau is enhanced by recognizing how Hegel's account of the tragic dimensions of enlightenment via reversals factors into Fanon's formulation of the transition from nationalism, as the byproduct of immediate knowledge, to national consciousness, as a higher form of knowing. Such a juxtaposition—Fanon's creolization of Rousseau concept of the general will against that of his creolization of Hegel's theory and employ of tragedy—reveals where national consciousness, in contrast with Rousseau's general will, should be understood in the sense of a state of affairs and outlook that the political community progresses into on the tail end of the tragic reversals wrought by experience. Those reversals bring the postcolonial subject to question and overcome the naïveté that facilitated the entrenchment of totalizing discourses and political practices that hijack the genuinely national imperative that was conceived at



the outset of the struggle to end colonialism. As they usher the postcolonial subject toward the higher, more complex understandings of political reality that Fanon means to indicate, these reversals give rise to the corresponding demand for institutional arrangements that facilitate a higher pedigree of democratic engagement in which differences are not subsumed by particularities masquerading as universals.

In conclusion, the creolization of Hegel's theory of tragedy in the radical Africana thought of Frantz Fanon accentuates the stark, irreconcilable social divide that the colonial world governed by Manichean logic entails. It accentuates the visceral upsurge as well through which the native seizes control and brings the postcolonial moment into being. There are dire consequences for the "work" of the native, this violence with which the native must dismantle the imposing colonial edifice (Fanon 1963, 85), as well as for the governing logic with which he undertakes the mandate. Since it is a project governed by an inversion of the Manichean logic through which the colonized were dominated, they, as such, never fully manage to escape the grasp of colonialism. Manichean thinking, in particular Manichean conceptions of rule, persists under the guise of nationalism that must be overcome and replaced by national consciousness, according to Fanon. Fanon's creolization of Hegel's use of the language of tragedy to shed light on the matter of experience and the tragic reversals that it gives rise to helps to shed light on the progressive component of national consciousness. National consciousness understood as such is a byproduct of the political experience of the postcolonial subject. Here, the creolization of Hegel's use of tragedy by Fanon helps to shed light on the distinction between his concept of the general will and Rousseau's idea of national consciousness.

## NOTES

1. Absolute Spirit, as Baker goes on to argue, is not so much a superseding of objective spirit as it is its complement. "[C]onsciousness of absolute spirit provides the final and most complete understanding of what is already objectively true" (ibid.).

2. Ibid., 105–6.

3. See also the introduction to Anne and Henry Paolucci's *Hegel on Tragedy* (2001, xix).

4. Hegel identifies three forms of poetry: the Epic, the Lyric, and the Dramatic forms. Tragedy as a subset represented the more spiritually substantial form in which the tension between the objective spirit that dominates the Epic and the subjective spirit of the Lyric form are resolved.

5. See also Markus (1996).

6. Ibid., 464. The emphasis is mine.

7. According to Hegel: "If this onesidedness is to be abrogated then it is this individual which, to the extent that his action is exclusively identified with this isolated pathos, must perforce be stripped and sacrificed. For the individual here is merely this single life, and, if this unity is not secured in its stability on its own account, the individual is shattered" (ibid.).

8. "[T]his structure and the perverse intercourse of its protagonists," he continues, "invite a vengeful insurrectionary action cast in the image of revolutionary catastrophism" (ibid.).

9. See Gibson (2003); Gordon (1995).

10. See the Introduction to Gordon and Sharpley-Whiting (1996).

11. See also Sekyi-Otu's critique of Homi K. Bhabha in Sekyi-Otu (1996) and also Sharpley-Whiting (1998).

12. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, Everyman (1973).

## Chapter Nine

# Hegel, Musical Subjectivity, and Jazz

Craig Matarrese

Hegel's treatment of music in his *Aesthetics* is characterized by ambivalence and tension, regarding the basic ontology of music, the relevant mediations of music performance, and the potential of music as a modern form of communal self-reflection, a practice of "absolute spirit." His comments on musical time and subjectivity are particularly interesting and seem to connect with other key ideas in his philosophy, but they announce a musical ontology broader than what he proceeds with in his analysis of the content of music; music, for Hegel, expresses "feelings" primarily through melody and harmony, and this nonconceptual content will give way rather easily to the conceptual articulations of philosophy, which he sees as the superior mode of modern self-understanding. And there is a broad tension here in Hegel's view: he struggles to show that art is centrally about freedom, that it overcomes "the understanding" by grasping the whole as a "concrete universal," and that it is a form of "absolute spirit," but then he also argues that art is surpassed by religion and philosophy, that it's no longer relevant or alive for us moderns.<sup>1</sup>

I won't try to address this tension in any general way here; rather, I want to focus on how it shows up in the context of music and emphasize Hegel's appreciation of aesthetic experience and his interest in understanding art from the inside, phenomenologically, as an autonomous unity. If we pay attention to Hegel's positive claims about music, we find that it is unique among the romantic arts because its "object" has no stable, material existence, and thus recruits consciousness in a way that is basic to the formation of genuine subjectivity. I argue that when we attend to the phenomenology of musical experience, in particular to the performance of instrumental music, we find layers of meaning that are fundamentally intersubjective and that can be taken up in communal self-reflection.

Instrumental jazz is an interesting type of music to consider here, for it brings Hegel's ambivalence into relief and also shows the intersubjective elements of music that seem consistent, at least, with what he has to say about musical time. Jazz has much in common with other music around the world, of course—neither improvisation nor a strong sense of individuality among musicians, nor any other admired feature, will uniquely pick it out—but jazz is nonetheless a type of music that I know well, as a listener and bassist, and it has become universal enough that I can appropriate some uncontroversial generalizations about it, and move on to those features of direct experience and musical practice that I find interesting here.

Pursuing this phenomenology of musical subjectivity brings to light some tensions in Hegel's view, but I think these are productive tensions, moments where he can be forced to see beyond himself.<sup>2</sup> In my view, Hegel should embrace the ontology suggested by his own comments on subjectivity and musical time, even if this creates ambiguity in the narrative of his *Aesthetics*, and even if this problematizes his assertions about the status of art relative to philosophy. He should also be much less worried that instrumental music will degenerate into mere self-expression: attention to the complexities and ambiguities of musical subjects, performing musicians and listeners alike, will show that instrumental jazz (and other music that shares its basic features) is at least as likely as any other art to become a vehicle for communal self-reflection.

## BENEATH THE SCORE

At any instrumental jazz performance, it is worth listening closely to the bassist, for even the experienced listener will have been influenced by typical cultural currents and writings on jazz that focus on lead instruments and soloists. I suggest that there's at least as much going on in the rhythm section.<sup>3</sup> Bass players seem to be less appreciated by critics and audiences, and this is not surprising in the sense that they are usually doing something that functions in the background of the music—for example, establishing a particular time-feel or groove for a tune—but this background, I would argue, makes it possible for everything else in the music to appear in the right way. Bassists are also operating “beneath the score,” as it were, because lead sheets in jazz are ontologically thin versions of a typical score: they specify only the main melody, song form, chords, key, and such, and this basic structure is usually all an ensemble has to connect them with the original composer of the tune. This puts a great deal of responsibility on individual musicians, as their interpretations of a lead sheet are necessarily quite robust. This can be heard easily when comparing different versions of “standard” jazz tunes: performances

are recognizable iterations of a tune but can have radically different time-feels, chord changes and substitutions, song form changes, and so on.

Much of what a bassist does in creating a time-feel or groove, interpreting lead sheets, and finding creative ways to revisit “standards” will show up in musical nuances and a reflective attitude about musical styles; any professional bassist who has worked in the jazz tradition, trained the way most jazz players do, learning theory and history, relating to significant bassists in the past, and so on, will utilize specific playing techniques to produce nuances corresponding to time-feels and styles (Monson 1996, 52). These techniques and nuances will have a diachronic connection with bassists in the history of jazz through what Maurice Merleau-Ponty would call the “intentional arc” of each player, the whole experiential background that is brought to bear on a musical situation, where finely tuned skills and habits are directed toward a musical result (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 84–94). So, for example, bassist and composer Charles Mingus wrote “My Jelly Roll Soul” as a tribute to Jelly Roll Morton, and in that tune plays a bass line in the style of the 1920’s jazz bassist’s “slap-pluck.”<sup>24</sup> This technique was a first departure from the bow, an adaptation of pizzicato playing, where the string is pulled straight away from the fretboard, so that a loud snap is heard when the string is released and the note is sounded; this method of adding a percussive attack made each note more distinct and generally louder than if merely plucked, and this was important when basses were unamplified and had to be heard through horns, drums, and such. Bassists like Bill Johnson, Steve Brown, and Pops Foster (all from New Orleans) pioneered this technique in jazz, moved from playing half-note, 2-feel grooves, to quarter-note lines, and laid the foundation for what we now consider the modern jazz walking line. When Mingus plays the bassline for “My Jelly Roll Soul,” the movements of his hands refer to traditions that span centuries and continents: his right-hand “slap-pluck” connects him to New Orleans, while his left hand connects him to positioning systems developed in the classical European tradition.

A bassist today might play an electric bass, amplified, with steel strings and will have a different set of skills directed toward producing musical nuances that contribute to time-feel and groove. Steel strings are louder and have higher tension than the gut strings the early jazz players had on their acoustic basses, so the strings can be set closer to the fretboard without buzzing against it when a string is played. This lowered action makes it easier to fret notes with the left hand, since the string has less distance to travel before meeting the fretboard; the higher tension means that the right hand can play faster with less energy and movement required to articulate notes on the string. These technological changes make the electric bass more playable in some ways, but pulls it away from the sounds of early jazz: with less room between the strings and the fretboard, the fingertips of the right hand cannot

“grab” as much of the string, and this grabbing is necessary for the round “thump” on the attack of each note characteristic of the early gut-string walking bass lines. But modern basses, pickups, and amplifiers have still empowered bassists overall by making more nuances hearable, even false-harmonics that barely speak, texture differences between, say, steel roundwound and nickel flatwound strings, and the characteristic sound of a player’s hands, resulting from their various physical and technique-driven idiosyncrasies.

As a matter of perceptual experience, though, when we’re listening to a jazz ensemble, we don’t hear these nuances *as nuances*; we don’t hear particular notes *as* slightly ahead or behind the beat, or *as* pitched slightly high or low, nor do we hear the texture of the bass line *as* a particular texture. There is, in other words, a figure/ground structure in this musical context: the figure here is the “feel” of the groove, as, for example, “leaning back,” “swinging,” “driving,” or “in the pocket,” and the ground is the set of nuanced rhythms that produce that feel.<sup>5</sup> There is a particular feel for each kind of groove, and we typically describe these feels with bodily metaphors; indeed, we might notice that different time-feels lead musicians and listeners to move their bodies differently as part of their perceptual experience of the music (Roholt 2014, 83–103). We can think about the “groove” or “time-feel” of the music as a rhythmic *Gestalt*: there are two or more interlocking rhythmic parts, determined as “parts” by way of the “whole,” that is, the dominant feel of the groove.<sup>6</sup> So, the rhythmic gestalt will typically include drums, bass, and any other instruments functioning as part of the rhythm section, where given the dominant “feel” of the groove, one can attend to that groove’s constituent aspects, for example, the drummer’s ride cymbal, the bassist’s line, and the pianist’s comping.

While there’s no guarantee that any jazz group playing any tune will find an interesting or optimal rhythmic gestalt, it seems fair to say that jazz musicians typically seek a groove that effectively conveys a “mood” or “feel” and this requires that they successfully negotiate that time-feel with other players. When musicians, with all of their own idiosyncratic backgrounds, are able to perceive time in the same way, the musical effect can be powerful. I would suggest that a primary reason why Miles Davis’ album *Kind of Blue* is the best-selling jazz album of all time is that his rhythm section (Bill Evans, Jimmy Cobb, Paul Chambers) found optimal rhythmic gestalts that conveyed distinct moods in each of the tunes. In conversation with Evans and Cobb, Chambers takes his walking line to different parts of the neck at specific times to build or release tension, modify texture, or solidify the sonic foundation; notes played near the headstock (the nut and first fret) are strong, with deeper fundamentals, because the total string length is longer, and notes near the bridge (the other end of the fretboard) can sound thinner, but more distinct (Monson 1996, 38–43). And of course, which notes are chosen in a

walking line, for example, playing the root note, another note in the chord, or a passing chromatic note, will have an impact on the color of the music, and which subtleties are brought out in a solo or melody, or in Evans' rich chords. But again, none of these nuances is typically heard *as nuances*; the nuances are the background, the figure is the primary feel or mood, and that figure, in the case of *Kind of Blue*, was anyway accessible and interesting to a wide audience of nonexperts, each of whom, with their own idiosyncratic intentional arc brought to bear on the musical situation, was able to grasp the rhythmic gestalt.

I have been pointing to jazz as a particular type of music, one that prioritizes improvisation and performance, and tried to capture some particularity and complexity, by focusing on the role of the bass in this music. My general characterization is supposed to be uncontroversial—that jazz valorizes virtuosity and individuality, or that jazz is characterizable by the swing groove and its many derivatives. But mainly, looking at jazz draws our attention to the complexity and ambiguity of musical subjects and musical experience: when we look at what's going on in jazz, what is meaningful about it, and how people experience that meaningfulness, we will be able to explore this case as a constructive challenge to Hegel's view of music.

## SELFHOOD AND MUSICAL TIME

In the context of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, music is a romantic art, along with painting and poetry, and the general development of romantic art is, he thinks, a process of turning inward, away from sensuous matter and toward abstraction. As the content of the romantic arts becomes more inward and abstract, the sensuous form becomes less and less suitable for expressing it. And music has an interesting location in Hegel's narrative, marking the transition from the note to the word, where the sensuousness of art is being superseded by the conceptuality of the word. Poetry, which follows music in Hegel's view, is both sensuous sound and conceptual content, and it's this move toward conceptual understanding that eventually points the way to philosophy.

As a form of "absolute spirit," though, art is a social practice of reflection on our most basic values and interests, generally trying to overcome the analytical tendencies of "the understanding" in this context, and responsive to a "universal and absolute need" for humans to represent themselves to themselves as thinking, conscious things (Hegel 1975a, 30–31). We need to become aware of ourselves as both an "in-itself," like things in nature, and a "for-itself," a thing that is self-aware; there is here both a theoretical and a practical aspect: (i) theoretically, we do this inwardly, in our own consciousness, abstractly, and (ii) practically, we manipulate external things and see our work and freedom



expressed in those things (Hegel 1975a, 31). “This,” Hegel argues, “is the free rationality of man in which all acting and knowing, as well as art too, have their basis and necessary origin” (Hegel 1975a, 31–32). The abstract or theoretical self-recognition here involves the spontaneity of mind; the practical self-recognition involves the artist’s spontaneity with sensuous, material matter.

So for Hegel, art attempts to grasp the whole through sensuous representation, religion through universals and metaphor, and philosophy through pure concepts, and he characterizes these types of reflection both in terms of knowledge of the world and in terms of self-understanding: the artist, the religious person, and the philosopher all have particular ways of understanding themselves that reflects their grasp of the whole (Beiser 2005, 288). When Hegel argues that philosophy is the highest form of reflection, he is supposing that all forms of “absolute spirit” share the same content, and so the various ways of articulating that content can be compared (Hegel 1975a, 517, 611). If we grant this, we can then say with Hegel that as “spirit” comes to awareness of itself through history, different forms of reflection will be more or less appropriate to spirit’s self-understanding: in certain times and places, art does the best job of capturing the whole, in others religion grasps the whole more effectively. Ultimately, though, Hegel argues that philosophy best captures the whole of reality, because only philosophy trades in pure concepts.

But it’s not obvious that there’s a “content” comparable across the arts, let alone across other forms of absolute spirit. And music is anyway already a peculiar case, because its “object” is so different than in the visual arts: sound fades away just as it is being experienced, leaving the musical subject with nothing in hand but the memory of what just happened alongside the sound now being heard (and perhaps also the projection and anticipation of what sounds are about to happen). Sounds by themselves are self-negating in the sense that they disappear on their own, without any subjective intervention: a new “now” will always arrive, as a negation of the “now” that preceded it. But a kind of “musical subjectivity” emerges for Hegel, as an active intervention into this endless and undifferentiated series of “nows,” a positive assertion of a self that persists, has experiences, and “recalls itself and finds itself again” in time (Hegel 1975a, 914). This is an expressive activity, a synthesizing of itself, and a kind of self-recognition.

Hegel describes a self that is “gripped,” “activated,” and “set in motion” by music, “in its simple self, in the center of its spiritual existence, it is elevated by the musical work and activated by it” (1975a, 906). Once activated, this self projects itself across musical time, and then recognizes itself as the music unfolds. “The self,” Hegel says, “is in time, and time is the being of the subject himself,” indeed, “since the time of the sound is that of the subject too, sound on this principle penetrates the self, grips it in its simplest being, and by means of the temporal movement and its rhythm sets the self in motion”

(1975a, 908). On Hegel's account, we find in music an aestheticized reflection on how subjectivity is constituted, on acquiring self-awareness: "the process of self-cancellation whereby it becomes an object to itself turns into self-awareness and now only through this self-relation does it come to have a sense and consciousness, etc., of itself" (1975a, 914).

Hegel's claim is not that musical time is an ontologically distinct form of time; he rather seems to connect musical time with other sorts of time that structure experience in nonmusical contexts. But music shows us something about time and consciousness, allowing us to appreciate the *feel* of that time, in a way that is likely inaccessible in our ordinary dealings with the world. We acquire a kind of self-comprehension through music, an awareness of and reflection on certain dynamic features of subjectivity, expressed by sounds that appear and fade away. But Hegel calls this self-comprehension "abstract," that is, something less than conceptual knowledge, an "inner sensibility" of "this simple concentrated center of the whole of human life"; this nonconceptual content "neither proceeds to intellectual considerations nor distracts our conscious attention to separate points of view, but is accustomed to live in deep feeling and its undisclosed depth" (1975a, 904–5).

But whether this nonconceptual content is part of the official "content" of music (the content that is supposed to be comparable across forms of absolute spirit) is not so clear. At some points he seems inclusive on this point: "expression in music has, as its *content*, the inner life itself, the inner sense of feeling and for the matter in hand"; he wants to acknowledge, at least, something we get from the time of music, alongside whatever we want to say about the content, the "feelings," expressed by melody and harmony (Hegel 1975a, 906–8). At least in the case of music with an accompanying text, the content issue is settled: the real content will come from the words, and the music will have an influence, but not one that changes the conceptual content of the words. In the case of instrumental music, though, which Hegel calls "independent" music, the content must come from the music by itself, but the more he says about this, the more his insights about time and selfhood are eclipsed by his attentiveness to functional harmony and melody. Harmony, for Hegel, is "the other content which alone fills in music's abstract foundation in bar and rhythm, and makes it possible for that foundation to become really concrete music" (1975a, 919). This is a telling comment that demotes the time-consciousness part of music's content to something that is insufficient by itself on account of its abstractness.

Hegel is more interested in the musical content expressed by melody and harmony, arguing that despite the fact that musical sounds are constantly falling out of existence, we can nonetheless find some "objectivity" in the harmonic structures that are expressed. Each note of a musical piece will have an identity and meaning that is the sum of all its relations to other notes across

time, and from this we can discern both melody and functional harmony. In the *Logic* and *Aesthetics*, Hegel pursues an analogy between a musical symphony and the development of the “concept”: both follow the creation and development of dissonance and tension, until an eventual tonic resolution (1975a, 927–28). This characterization of music connects it directly, if abstractly, with what Hegel always sees as the proper content of art, namely, reconciliation and unity (1975a, 939–49).

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC AND TIME-FEEL

Instrumental music, then, becomes the difficult case for Hegel, the case that draws out his ambivalence. I’ve been suggesting that his view of the content of music contains some ambiguity—namely, about whether and in what way the time-feel of music is part of its content. Hegel does refer to “the necessity of time’s being in general the dominant thing in music,” but the time he’s thinking of here seems to be constrained by what can be notated in a composer’s score, and that move at once commits to a narrow ontology and a prioritization of composers over musicians (1975a, 913). I want to argue for a broader ontology, though, where it’s clear that the relevance structures of music are set by the time-feel or groove, so, for example, when feeling the time in a particular way, certain notes and accents will acquire meaning from how they sit in the context of that time-feel, and we will expect those notes to sit in that way because we’re projecting our selves into that music, with that time-feel, as it unfolds. In other words, I want to take seriously Hegel’s own comments about musical time and resolve the ambivalence in his view toward including the time-feel or groove of music in its content.

One place to start is to consider the way one might appreciate the time-feel of a jazz swing, just in itself, aside from any melody or harmonic structure beyond what’s needed to establish a particular swing groove (Gracyk 1996; Roholt 2014, 127–29). Bass players in the earlier decades of jazz learned to take a solo by just continuing the walking line—this kept the swing going and drew attention to it, as though to say “*this* is the feel of the tune.” Hegel’s account might provide some explanation why experiencing just the time-feel of music can be so satisfying. It is not that consciousness is haphazardly latching onto “nows” as they go by; rather, “the satisfaction which the self acquires, owing to the bar, in this rediscovery of itself is all the more complete because the unity and uniformity does not pertain either to time or the notes in themselves; it is something which belongs solely to the self and is inserted into time by the self for its own self-satisfaction” (Hegel 1975a, 915). And also consistent with Hegel’s view, the self-satisfaction here is not conceptually determinate knowledge; it is not something one could explain

or notate. We feel music with our bodies, and we want to move with music because it reaches us in all of our embodied particularity: “music gets hold of the individual as *this* man” (1975a, 906). Hegel rightly argues that “some form of musical time must be asserted before notes can even be picked out as notes, and that there needs to be some repeating frame of time, some recurring rhythmic module (the bar/measure) across which self-projection and self-satisfaction can occur” (1975a, 914). But his analysis quickly moves to a formalistic appreciation of basic accent patterns and time-signatures, and he repeatedly describes the work of “the bar” as producing an abstract unity; nothing becomes concrete for Hegel until melody and harmony enter the picture (Hegel 1975a, 915–17).

In my view, though, the time-feel or groove of music is not so abstract; in fact, the time-feel of music is precisely what pulls together the concrete whole, and we can see this if we attend to the phenomenology of recollection and anticipation in music. When one feels the groove of a piece of music in a particular way, one commits to hearing it *as* “leaning back” or *as* “swinging” in a certain way, and this will structure how one recalls what has just happened as well as what one is anticipating. For example, if one is feeling a medium swing as sitting far on the back of the beat, this will set up the way one expects future accents to fall on the beat, and one’s finger-snapping, foot-tapping, dancing, or note-playing will express this commitment. Committing to feeling the groove in a particular way, we are ready to hear the next note in determinate way, and we’re projecting this groove many “bars” into the future. And this is also a prerequisite for surprise: it’s only because we’re anticipating an accent, committing to its being accented, that we are then surprised when that doesn’t happen.

Hegel is certainly aware of how good music shows invention and surprise, and he values “freedom from the pedantry of metre and the barbarism of a uniform rhythm,” but he doesn’t seem to be taking account of how the time-feel or groove lays the groundwork against which invention can show up (1975a, 917). It seems to me that the notes of the melody and the chords underneath it are insufficient for generating determinate expectations; we don’t have a *general* anticipation of resolution to the root chord, we rather anticipate it happening at a specific moment in the context of a particular time-feel. Even if we imagine we’re attending only to functional harmony, it seems that the harmonic rhythm, that is, the rate at which chords move by, is what gives determinacy to our expectations.

Another way to see this point, perhaps even a way to appropriate and broaden Hegel’s talk of the “feelings” that music can convey, is to think of time-feels and grooves as “moods.” Moods condition our experience in a fundamental way, so we might say, for example, that for someone in an impatient mood, things and people will show up as moving too slowly. Being in

a mood means that the world is appearing in a certain way, a way that seems to confirm the mood itself, and this will shape our recollections and anticipations as well. Hegel seems entirely aware that music can express a mood and draw listeners into it: he suggests that a noisy and restless crowd of people in a restaurant can be calmed and focused with the addition of music, as “music comes to the rescue” (1975a, 907). The music in the restaurant draws patrons into a mood, they become attuned to the world in the same way, and their restlessness evaporates as they come to find themselves in the same world, now with more consonant anticipations of the future, and so on.

Hegel might nonetheless insist that musical moods are driven primarily by melody and harmony, so it’s helpful to look at a case where two iterations of the same tune produce very different moods. Consider the experiences of listening to two versions of the Rodgers and Hammerstein tune “My Favorite Things”: (i) the original 1959 Broadway musical version and (ii) John Coltrane’s 1961 jazz version.<sup>7</sup> The sheet music is the same for both (Coltrane apparently got the Broadway sheets from a peddler who showed up at one of his gigs (Ratliff 2007)); they are both clearly performances of the same tune, with the same melody and harmony. But Coltrane’s rhythm section replaced the “um-pa-pa” waltz feel with a syncopated feel in 6. Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, and Steve Davis created a new rhythmic gestalt, a new musical mood, that radically changed the nature of the tune. Ingrid Monson argues that Coltrane’s new time-feel forces the melody to come out differently: “against this syncopated and interlocking rhythmic and harmonic framework for participation, it would be almost impossible to play the melody as squarely as it is written in the sheet music” (Monson 1996, 110–11). Another example of this phenomenon can be found with the Neil Hefti tune “Lil Darlin,” comparing Count Basie’s version, with its characteristic slow and deep swing, to any version that tries to take the tune even a little faster.<sup>8</sup> As any musician who’s played this tune will attest, the faster version will lose the optimal rhythmic gestalt; musicians know that tempo is crucially important for grooves, that everything can change across iterations of a tune, just from this one variable (Monson 1996, 68–69).

I’ve been arguing that the time-feel or groove of music should be included as part of the proper “content” of music and that this rhythmic gestalt establishes a mood that conditions the way other elements of the music appear. It’s worth emphasizing that time-feel is not abstract; rather, it pulls music together as a whole. One must overcome the tendencies of “the understanding” in order to grasp the rhythmic gestalt as the main “feel” of the music, because taking the background nuances *as* nuances will undermine that time-feel. Finding the optimal way to hear the rhythmic gestalt requires that one approach music as a whole; feeling the groove is the practice of concrete universality in this context.<sup>9</sup>

## PERFORMANCE, IMPROVISATION, AND STYLE

Hegel appreciates the performative aspect of music, but as with time-feel and groove, there is ambivalence here: it's not clear whether and to what extent the performance of music, by particular musicians, in concrete situations, matters for the "content" or meaning of that music. As in the previous section, I'm arguing here that Hegel must broaden his musical ontology, now to include features of improvisational performance, specifically the intersubjective negotiation of musical time and the mutual recognition expressed by that negotiation, and made concrete through the mediation of style. With the more robust ontology I'm suggesting, we find that the content of music can be connected with "ethical substance": musical communities find new ways to share time together, through an ongoing reflection on style and so present possibilities for reconciling some aspects of their complex self-identities with a broader sense of community.

In some contexts, Hegel seems enthusiastic about what musicians do, as in the case of the genuine virtuoso, which he considers to be a modern "miracle" of genius, indeed something that can expand "the notion of what music is and what it can do" (1975a, 936). And he seems happy to grant in general that musicians are real artists with "spiritual and technical" skill (Hegel 1975a, 909). Hegel is sensitive to the fact that in some musical situations, a robust form of interpretation is demanded from the musician, who now "composes in his interpretation, fills in gaps, deepens what is superficial, ensouls what is soulless and in this way appears as downright independent and productive" (1975a, 956). When we listen to excellent musicians, Hegel says, "we have present before us not merely a work of art but the actual production of one" (1975a, 957).

At the same time, he can't resist suggesting that musicians are often "the most unintelligent of men," and much of his praise seems carefully calibrated (Hegel 1975a, 930). It's not clear, for example, whether his distinction between "a work of art" and "the actual production of one" leaves much room to appreciate what musicians really do there, relative to the contribution of a composer. His recollection of a guitarist he once heard is telling in this way, since his point seems to be that despite the fact that the guitar is a "trivial instrument," and despite the "tasteless way" this guitarist composed, there was nonetheless something admirable about it; the virtuosity here "displays its inner unbounded freedom by surpassing itself in playing with apparently insurmountable difficulties, running riot with ingenuity, making surprising jokes in a witty mood with interruptions and fancies, and making enjoyable in its original inventions even the grotesque itself" (Hegel 1975a, 957–58). But notice the backhanded praise here: the real content of the music is grotesque,

but this is overlooked because the musician's technical mastery is so astounding. In fact, Hegel's calibrated praise here draws attention to what he thinks is the problem with instrumental music and the talented musicians who perform it: the form or medium becomes more important than the content of the music, and the performance is largely about the skills themselves. This may well be entertaining music in Hegel's view, but it's failing as art, failing as a form of "absolute spirit."

This narrow sense of the "content" of music, though, supposes the relationship that matters most in music is between the composer and the listener, that the meaningfulness of music is something provided as a "given" for the listener's experience. On this model, then, the co-constitution of musical time would be something going on between the composer and the listener: the composer is responsible for expressing her inner sense of time in the music, and the listener projects her own consciousness into and across that music while experiencing it. But even where Hegel is recognizing that hearing live music is different than, say, looking at a painting that was completed long ago, he never takes seriously this difference between synchronously and asynchronously co-constituted time.

In my view, though, jazz is built around the synchronous co-constitution of time, fundamentally through the achievement of a particular time-feel or groove. I've been describing the time-feel of music as a "rhythmic gestalt," which entails the idea that there are multiple players involved, creating and maintaining a groove together, and this is consonant with the ways that professional jazz musicians tend to talk about sharing musical time.<sup>10</sup> So, when two or more jazz musicians are improvising together, they are trying to share a sense of time with each other, trying to create a rhythmic gestalt that expresses a particular feel—this forms an intersubjective unity-in-difference. Each musician plays with a sense of independence and dependence, freedom and constraint, and attempts to actualize an ensemble where the "I" is a "We" and the "We" is an "I"—they seek mutual recognition through musical time. So, for example, when a bassist and drummer attempt to find a particular time-feel, their playing (notes, rhythms, and innumerable musical nuances) is a solicitation to each other, looking to establish the optimal rhythmic gestalt, suggesting provisional ways they might both feel "at home" in the time. One can even imagine a dynamic of "pure" and "impure" recognition here, where the former is a successful attempt and the latter unsuccessful, perhaps because one of the musicians is too self-assertive or insensitive to the other's contribution; failure to establish the optimal rhythmic gestalt will sound like a power struggle among the musicians and will undermine the music's "feel" and mood.

I am not suggesting that the sort of mutual recognition expressed by musicians improvising and sharing a musical time-feel together is the same as



the more developed and conceptually mediated account of recognition in the *Phenomenology* or the *Philosophy of Right*; on the contrary, mutual recognition in the context of music is more like the recognition in Hegel's account of love (Houlgate 1998). In his early fragment on *Love*, he is considering a basic relation that can exist between two living consciousnesses, not between a living consciousness and a "dead thing"; love provides a dynamic structure of mediation in which the contours of selfhood can be reconfigured, and in which we find dependence and independence, self-sacrifice and self-development, surrender and empowerment (Matarrese 2010, 36–39). Hegel's mature view of recognition takes it to be mediated by political and legal institutions, structures of normativity, and the conceptual understanding of modern individuality and rights. Of course, there are structures of normativity that mediate the practices of music, governing how musicians treat each other, how they approach the music, and so on, but here I'm only pointing to the non-conceptual terrain "beneath" these various normative expectations, the terrain of time-feel and rhythmic gestalts. It's at this level that we find the possibility of mutual recognition, and it's worth noting that professional jazz bassists and drummers often describe their relationships in terms of the "marriage" metaphor, which is just where Hegel relocates his talk of the recognition of love in the *Philosophy of Right* (Monson 1996, 180).

This sort of mutual recognition through creating the time-feel of music, then, is not initially mediated by conceptual thought; it is primarily just a physical, embodied negotiation of musical feel, between fully particular and concrete individuals, in historically and culturally mediated musical practices. These complex and particular individuals will seek recognition through music in a way that is mediated by style, both as a nonconceptual feel for the musical time or groove of a style and as a conceptual understanding of what a style is about, what it seeks to achieve, how it has developed among its participants, and how it relates to other styles (Ford 2010). So, for example, jazz bassists "know" (in a nonconceptual way that involves innumerable musical nuances) how to communicate in a variety of styles, each of which has distinct rhythmic gestalts, and each of which requires negotiation with other musicians during performance; bassists will typically also be able to analyze styles, make claims about them and such. It is useful to talk about style in this way because styles stretch across and change over time. A particular musician will have her own complex history and experience that she brings to an engagement with a musical style, and her execution of that music will be both a way of projecting herself into that musical time and a way of confirming or disconfirming various elements that are taken to constitute that style.

Recall that Hegel's main concern with instrumental music is that it could become a retreat into the inner life of subjectivity. I suggest, however, that engaging with a musical style, with time-feels and grooves that are

characteristic of styles, among musicians and audiences, is itself a form of communal self-reflection. Engaging with musical styles will be an ongoing consideration and revision of that style, the continuous evolution and development of what that style is about. So, for example, when Ornette Coleman started playing clubs in New York City in 1959, and soon thereafter recorded his album *Free Jazz*, he was both (i) offering new rhythmic gestalts, new ways of projecting oneself in musical time, and (ii) reflecting on the style of jazz at the time, on its main aspirations as art (Matarrese 2010, 99–102). Another example is the way that Coltrane’s music was taken up by Latin players in the 1960s and later—his modal tunes were reinterpreted with *montuno* vamps and clave rhythms central to Afro-Caribbean music, again projecting new forms of musical time, and changing the way people thought about that style (Ratliff 2007, 175–93). Eddie Palmieri, the Latin bandleader, along with many musicians who worked for him, even explored the relationship between the asymmetry of Coltrane’s phrasing and the asymmetry of the clave rhythm (five notes across two bars), which gets to the heart of the relationship between time-feel and melody (Ratliff 2007, 189–91).

A related concern, for Hegel, about instrumental music is that it will become too complex and lose its grip on the emotional content that is successfully conveyed by music with less complexity (especially simpler music with a text). He worries that instrumental music has “lost power over the whole inner life” and that the pleasure it gives becomes one-sided, appealing only to the “bare interest in the purely musical element in the composition and its skillfulness, a side of music which is for connoisseurs only and scarcely appeals to the general human interest in art” (Hegel 1975a, 899). But notice how intellectualized and formalistic Hegel takes this expert listening to be: “the expert who has at his fingers’ ends the inner musical relations between notes and instruments, loves instrumental music in its artistic use of harmonies and melodious interactings and changing forms”; indeed, Hegel’s expert listener, the sort who feels nothing is lacking in instrumental music, is already analyzing and “comparing what he has heard with the rules and laws that are familiar to him so that he can fully criticize and enjoy the composition” (1975a, 954).

Hegel’s worry here, though, is again based on a narrow view of musical content, but if we acknowledge that the time-feel, the rhythmic gestalt of music, is part of its content, then we also, by that same move, take as relevant that feature of music most accessible to nonexperts. So, for example, be-bop is complicated melodically and harmonically, and there’s no need to deny that only experts are likely to catch all the complexity here, but be-bop is still quite accessible to a wide variety of nonexpert listeners, because the time-feel is part of a recognizable style of jazz and has a place in the development of swing in twentieth-century jazz. Listeners are generally willing to enjoy

complex melodies and harmonies when there's an accessible and appealing time-feel underneath them, and in general, it seems that music can be as complex as its supporting cultural context is inclined to warrant.

The general move I'm suggesting here, to address Hegel's concern that instrumental music will tend toward inaccessible complexity and abstract inwardness, is to emphasize the way meaning in music is determined by some set of relevant social practices, which mediates our experience of the features of the work itself. There's no need to deny that the melodic and harmonic features of a musical work can have the meaning Hegel considers, but at least as important as these features is the time-feel of the music as mediated by considerations of style, and all of the social practices surrounding the discourse of style (Bowie 2007, 133). Pushing Hegel's account to take seriously the mediation of style saves it from having to describe the "emotional" content of music in abstraction from cultural and historical context, and from having to imagine that musicians and listeners are fully formed in some way, with a fixed receptiveness to stable meanings for emotions (Johnson 1991, 159).<sup>11</sup>

One can make the case that jazz is a type of music that, at its best, reconciles individual freedom and group action, escapes mere self-expression and gratuitous complexity, and cultivates communal self-reflection, that jazz is a truly free art, in Hegel's sense (Hegel 1975a, 48–50, 515). Jazz musicians seek freedom not just for themselves, but with others through their music; this means they must embrace the ambiguities and unpredictability of improvised music. And the claim that the jazz community is engaged in communal self-reflection is now much more plausible given the technology of recording and availability of recorded performances: music has acquired a new "objectivity" where performances function as "texts," establishing a foundation for intertextuality and more robust forms of interpretation and reflection.<sup>12</sup> On this view, the practices of jazz cultivate Hegelian freedom, and this could be shown for both listeners and musicians, including how this is worked out in the experience of the improvising jazz bassist (Monson 1996, 214–15). But one does have to make the case, with some specificity and context, because nothing rules out in advance the possibility that the practices of jazz lead in the other direction, away from Hegelian freedom, toward conformism and superficiality.<sup>13</sup>

I've tried to show here that when we pay attention to the phenomenology of musical experience, and to the complexity of the subjects who perform and listen to music, we are forced to remain open to new meanings in music, new forms of mutual recognition through music, and new ways that music can become communal self-reflection. New rhythmic gestalts in music are not merely forms of self-expression; they present new ways for subjectivity to project itself into the future, and ways for people to share time together. Perhaps music can teach us to be open to other ways of existing in time, and

perhaps we can even cultivate an aptitude or facility at grasping novel and foreign grooves, at being open to others at this fundamental level. The sense of time we experience in music, along with the type of mutual recognition that occurs there, is nonconceptual, but this is not a fault of music; on the contrary, our musical experience becomes mediated by concepts as we engage with styles and reflect on those styles as communities.

We might say of Hegel's view at this point that it must remain open to the possibility that music may still matter to us in a way that is not reducible to the conceptual claims of philosophy. The meaning of music will always be incomplete and indeterminate, because it refers to the subjects who perform and listen to it, and who seek mutual recognition through it; these musical subjects bring to the musical situation their own complex and idiosyncratic intentional arcs. Hegel argues that modern music, especially instrumental music, is characterized by "abstract inwardness" and a tendency to withdraw into hypersubjectivity, but when we pay attention to the influential figures in jazz, their music, the perspectives of their bassists, and the larger jazz community, we find rather an embrace of creolization in music, a celebration of hybridity and syncretism of style, and an invitation to use music as a vehicle for communal self-reflection.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Houlgate (1991), Beiser (2005), and Bowie (2007).
2. One might try for some explanatory traction with reference to Hegel's own lack of musical experience and understanding, his aesthetic Eurocentrism, or his seeming need for *ad hoc* theorizing to fit music into his overall system, but this would be less interesting than developing his better insights. See Hegel (1975a, 893, 930).
3. I'm not the first to emphasize the rhythm section in this context; see especially Monson (1996, 29–34). See also Berliner (1994).
4. Charles Mingus, "My Jelly Roll Soul" on *Blues & Roots* (Atlantic, 1960).
5. See Roholt (2014, 43–82).
6. See Monson (1996, 223); the term is from Guilbault (1993). See also Roholt (2014, 62–69).
7. "My Favorite Things," Rodgers and Hammerstein (1959); Coltrane (1961); see Monson (1996, 106–21).
8. Neil Hefti, "Lil Darlin'" (1957).
9. See Beiser (2005, 289).
10. See Monson (1996, 68, 93).
11. See also Davies (2001, 18–19).
12. See Monson (1996); Alperson (2010, 276).
13. See Matarrese (2012).

*Part III*

**ETHICAL LIFE, LAW, AND POLITICS**



## Chapter Ten

### The Future Is Now

#### *Leopoldo Zea's Hegelianism and the Liberation of the Mexican Past*

Carlos Alberto Sánchez

Slavoj Žižek says rather definitively: “what defines philosophy in the last two centuries is its dissociation from Hegel, the incarnate monster of ‘panlogicism’” (2015). Philosophy is thus conceived as itself in a life and death struggle with the Hegelian influence, the “monster” for whom mediation (“panlogicism”) is the ultimate weapon of erasure. And so, for two centuries, philosophers have sought an “escape [from] the mediation of the concept” (2015). The “escape” has taken the form of an affirmation of that which is *other* to the monstrous leveling of reason; of an insistence on the radical alterity of the escapee fleeing mediation—in short, it has motivated the affirmation of a *difference* that cannot be subsumed into the sameness of an all-consuming logic. In response to, or in spite of, Hegel, detractors have labored to create a great distance between the ravenous dialectic that consumes all particularity and that particularity itself. The achievement of this distance means that particularity and difference are valued for their own sake and, the hope is, without the validations of monsters or absolutes.

In Mexico, the affirmation of difference and particularity has not required the dissociation to which Žižek refers; rather than an escape, a confrontation has taken place, one most elegantly carried out by Leopoldo Zea. Far from fleeing the monster, Zea appropriates Hegel’s “panlogicism” as this informs the latter’s philosophy of history and, most importantly, proceeds to subsume and assume Hegel’s famous *dismissal* of Latin American historical maturity as an opportunity for cultural strength and historical possibility. That is, Zea agrees with Hegel regarding the dialectical nature of history and pays particular attention to the moment of *Aufhebung* or mediation that defines dialectic, which also means that he will agree with Hegel’s assertion regarding Latin America’s absence in the world-historical struggle. But, synthesizing these two points, Zea suggests, against Hegel, that Latin America’s historical



immaturity is not due to an absence of reason (as Hegel claimed) but to an evasion of process or dialectic; rather than assimilating and thus overcoming, preserving, and sublimating the conflicts and complexities of its cultural *past*, the Latin American consciousness sought to *superimpose* [*superposición*] other cultures and other histories (particularly, European and North American cultures and histories) onto its own, thus evading a dialectic that would reveal its own authentic and original historical being (Zea 1949, 323). From this observation, Zea articulates the possibility for an authentic Latin American history and culture grounded on the *assimilation* [*asimilación*] of its past, a past it has worked toward covering up through rational (and imitative) dismissals and evasions.

Ultimately, and against the backdrop of Hegel's dismissal, Zea outlines a philosophy of history in which conflict and difference mark the positive moments of affirmation and assimilation. These will be cultural and historical moments that individuate and define the Latin American character on the one hand and Latin American culture as an intersubjective whole on the other, and both worthy of dignity and respect. These are also the moments that awaken the "monster" to a recognition of difference and thus to a broader, more inclusive concept of humanity—both of its own and that of others. In the end, Zea's re-articulation of the journey of *Spirit* through Latin America is meant to de-mystify a Western consciousness that deems itself "absolute," making it account for the *difference* that disturbs it and awakens it to a sense of its own completeness (and incompleteness). Zea does this work for a purpose: to motivate solidary, complicity, and liberatory action in his Latin American readers, who will then see their present struggles as rooted in their failure to approach their past with the courage to confront and assimilate it, a failure that allows the colonizing force of Eurocentric rationality to demean all historical accomplishment (such as the cultural achievements of indigenous civilizations) and any pretensions to future triumphs (for instance, the pretention or desire for *contemporaneousness*<sup>1</sup>).

The following discussion centers on Zea's early appropriation of Hegel as we find it in his "*Dialectica de la Consciencia en Mexico*" or "Dialectic of Consciousness in Mexico" from 1951.<sup>2</sup> Here, Zea initially mimics the Hegelian dialectic in an effort to frame the confrontation and struggle between historically, geographically, and spiritually different others. Once this is framed, he appropriates this dialectic—which is now more than mere mimicry—in an effort to account for the specific struggle and the specific difference of Mexicans and the Mexican circumstance. We could say, as is the theme of the present collection, that Zea *creolizes* Hegel in his effort to confront the marginalization of Latin America not only by Hegel's philosophy of history but also by Eurocentric history and philosophy in general.

## ZEÁ'S READING OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Mexico's struggle for self-consciousness and recognition, representing but one aspect of the greater Latin American dialectic, is chronicled in Zea's "The Dialectic of Consciousness in Mexico." Here we find Zea's "Latin-Americanization" of the Hegelian dialectic, a humanistic project of liberation involving an appropriation, an overcoming, and a sublimation of Hegel's account itself.

This essay, delivered at a conference in 1951, is indicative of Zea's overarching philosophical preoccupation—namely, the dialectical movement of *spirit* through Latin America. Clearly concerned with Hegel's then century-old verdict regarding the Americas, Zea aims, in this early essay, to provide an account, or *phenomenology*, of spirit's journey through Mexico, focusing in particular on the life and death struggle for recognition that played itself out in the confrontation between the master consciousness of the European colonizer and the dependent consciousness of the non-European *others*—the last group made up of two kinds of nonhistorical *others*, one that is "discovered" (i.e., the indigenous other) and another that is "created" in the event of the encounter (i.e., the *mestizo* other). Zea's appropriation and transformation of Hegel accomplishes the otherwise impossible task of articulating the complexities of Mexican history and culture and in the process originates a new manner of philosophizing that can be described, as he himself describes it, as uniquely *American*.

On the surface, Zea's reading of Hegel is not controversial. Hegel famously dismisses America (with special emphasis on South America) as a place for history or philosophy in a few short paragraphs in his *Philosophy of History*. Hegel reports that history, in its monstrous march toward freedom, has relatively recently encountered before unknown geographies whose inhabitants, "especially in Peru and Mexico," are uniquely unlike Europeans and have proven to be "mild" and "physically and psychically powerless" before them (Hegel 2004, 81). Of course, their powerlessness is revealed before the swords and gods of their conquerors, who find it their duty to teach the strange and barbarous others how to exist or how to live and when to have sex (82), an incompetence that further verifies that, at the time of their encounter, these others did not possess anything like a consciousness of freedom and independence, qualities necessary for history to take hold. In those few and brief paragraphs, Hegel justifies the subjugation of the Americas, especially South America (*including Mexico*), that, despite a rich pre-Columbian past, cannot, on their own, proclaim a historical identity until *Europe teaches it how to do so*, or "succeeds in producing independence of feeling in them" (81).<sup>3</sup> America, concludes Hegel, has no history and is therefore the "land of

the future” (86) that will come to its own if and when Europeans take it upon themselves to rid the barbarians of their barbarism. In this Hegelian narrative, domination by Europe, then, seems like a historical, as well as a moral, necessity; that is, domination, imperialism, and colonization are thought to be the necessary means to awaken the primitive consciousness and, ultimately, introduce a desire for freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Zea accepts Hegel’s observations regarding Latin American history, or lack thereof. He writes:

the past was always with the Latin American; it was a part of his being. The future never became present; the past never became the past. Utopia, instead of becoming an actuality, receded farther and farther every day. . . . The past continued to be present in the diverse forms of life of those men who struggled in vain to extirpate it. With a present and a past which had never become an actuality, history, our history, did not exist. The most it could expect to become, as Hegel held, was a land of the future. (1963, 13)

As the “land of the future,” Latin America and Mexico are thus placed *outside* of history, excluded from the movement of Spirit and the progress of Reason. But, and significantly, situating Latin America in this nonhistorical, a-rational space allows for the dehumanization, exploitation, and marginalization that follows. Mario Sáenz says that it “justifies colonization as service to the Spirit of freedom” (1999, 108).

Zea’s strategy within this Hegelian framework is to make *the fact* about Latin America’s nonexistent history into a new dialectical moment that will bring about a consciousness of outsideness, of marginality, of barbarity, that, in turn, will lead to the assimilation of the Latin American past and the integration of that past into a more authentic and inclusive history of humanity. But this history must not be the Eurocentric history of which Hegel served as mouthpiece, since the past-turned-history of Latin America does not fit that scheme<sup>5</sup>; rather, it must be a history without a center, originating in the sites of its enunciation and conceived in the rationality of its participants. Zea writes:

Only peoples who have not assimilated their history can continue to feel threatened by their past. Hence the urgent necessity of effecting this assimilation. . . . We must assimilate our past; we must become conscious of it. . . . History is not made of facts alone, but rather of the awareness which one has of facts. It is this that we still have not attained; it is this for which Hegel reproaches us. (Zea 1963, 14–15)

Thus, Zea doubles back to Hegel, whose reproach is now a moment in the dialectical awakening of Latin Americans that for 500 years have thought

themselves “heirs without rights to European culture” rather than to their own “past, history, and reality” which they consider “the negative per excellence” (Zea 1949, 324–25). Assimilation of the *past* means that the negative can become a positive *historical* moment raised to the level of consciousness. It would also mean, moreover, that Latin America would no longer be of the future; it would mean that Latin America, and especially Mexico, is of the now.

### ZEA’S “THE DIALECTIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN MEXICO” (1952)

In his lecture “The Dialectic of Consciousness in Mexico,” Zea begins his analysis with the thesis that consciousness is constituted by “concrete acts” carried out in a “living reality” which is “human existence in the most authentic of its meanings,” namely, in “coexistence” (1952, 192). Consciousness is thus not an abstract, supra- or supernatural notion but rather refers to a “knowing in common” or a “knowing of others,” *with others*. This intersubjective aspect of consciousness means that consciousness manifests itself as “complicity” (192). But complicity, and thus consciousness, is a difficult achievement, since it requires an “acceptance of others,” an achievement that goes against pretensions of the ego, which desires acceptance only for itself (192).

Following Hegel, Zea accepts the view that the history of any culture is the history of the struggle between subjects who desire recognition and those who have the power to deny it. It is, he says, “a bitter, painful, struggle, in which individuals injure and are injured” (1952, 192). But it is precisely those injuries that allow one to gain consciousness of oneself and one’s place in the schema of another’s world. The emotional distress of witnessing the death of others or the physical pains of hunger or torture reveal oneself in a world, as unpleasant as that world may be. Those injuries suffered, however, are injuries of which only *human beings* can be conscious. Thus, with the distress and the pain and the scars comes the recognition of our own humanity, all of which makes the struggle necessary and worthwhile. For Zea, this is the first movement of a liberatory “dialectic” (193).

Because Zea’s endgame is to reject the Hegelian suggestion that America’s marginalization in history is a problem to be dealt with in “the future,” proposing, rather, that the future is now and that, particularly in Mexico, the dialectic has reached a moment of crisis, Zea restricts his Hegel to the master-slave section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>6</sup> With this in mind, he substitutes Hegel’s abstract “master” and abstract “slave” to concrete Europeans and concrete indigenous others. This is because, Zea argues, the concrete, particular, and

situated human being is the only entity that bestows meaning to the circumstance, or the only being that engages in acts of “setting things in their place” so that the circumstance is “familiar and not strange” (193). When unfamiliar others appear in the familiar surroundings of situated concrete human beings, threatening to objectify and disturb the calm of familiarity, a “strange and contradictory battle” takes place, in which inhabitants face invaders intent on destroying them while simultaneously demanding recognition of their superior humanity. At stake in this contradictory battle are both the “negation of humanity” (of the inhabitants) and “self-recognition” (of the invaders). To the victor goes the power to preside over life and death, the power to demarcate the boundaries between human and barbarian, and the power to separate the rational from the irrational. Of course, the defeated, aware that the power over life and death, humanity and inhumanity, rests in the hands of the victorious, and aware, also, of their place, or non-place, in a human realm constructed *a posteriori* by a power greater than themselves, are likewise aware of their awareness. This residuum of humanity (awareness of awareness) constitutes the possibility of liberation and the motivating impulse for dialectic, since regardless of its insignificance, the residue is an opportunity to negotiate.

A dialectic begins that is nothing more than a negotiation [*ragateo*] through which humanity itself is demanded and granted. At play in this negotiation is the very existence of human beings. It is a negotiation that turns into tragedy when force, brutal impositions, and colonialism are introduced through which man believes himself affirmed through the negation of any possible similarities that the other may possess. (193)

Of course, in this dialectic, in this struggle, European man has always emerged victorious, a victory that precipitates the tragedy to which Zea alludes. As told by Hegel, the tragedy unfolds when the victorious consciousness realizes that it cannot kill the subjugated consciousness at the risk of losing the recognition that that consciousness gives it (Hegel 1977, 114–15). As Zea sees it, the victorious consciousness, on discovering the redoubled dependence that ties him to the subjugated other, must then maintain the defeated consciousness in its subjugation through practices of force, brutality, and colonialism. These negations, which require the erasure of whatever is different or strange in relation to an established system of familiarity, are carried out by the victor for the sake of power and control. The most obvious targets of such erasure procedures are those that *look* different. This is because “the pigmentation of the skin, whether black, brown, or yellow is a good source of justification” for violence and subjugation (Zea 1952, 194).

Zea thus attempts to fill out Hegel’s abstract characterization of the victor in the historical struggle with a concrete character from Latin American

history; the victor is “white,” “male,” and “propertied” [*amo o patron*], “accidental characteristics that are elevated to the category of archetype” (194). The loser, on the other hand, is whatever represents the negation of those “accidental characteristics,” and if they are to be recognized in their humanity, they *must* erase whatever difference does not meet the standards of the “archetype.”

Other peoples, if they are to save themselves, that is, if they are to make themselves known on the same level as [their masters], will have to submit themselves to a cultivating and civilizing action. Everything that does not fit within the frames of comprehension of those privileged societies will have to be eliminated, or, at least, adapted to the terms of that comprehension. (195)

In other words, membership in Western civilization will require the elimination of whatever appears “strange” or unfitting to schemes of comprehension considered historically authorized and, thus, properly human. Radical alterity, in this sense, is whatever stands outside the space of reasons (and beliefs) that structure the victor’s world and, as such, is its most dangerous threat.

America had once been the absolute negation of the West, serving as the absolutely alien other to the monstrous absolutism of Europe. As the future arrives, however, that negated other must retrace itself, undo its erasure, and reclaim its Americanness, or, in Zea’s case, its Mexicanness. In Zea’s account, the others who are called upon to retrace themselves are modern Mexicans—now including indigenous as well as mestizos—who must make themselves visible before universal humanity without sacrificing their difference (i.e., their history). And the key to visibility is the self-recognition that power lies in difference, a truth that the master consciousness had already discovered in discovering his dependence on the subjugated consciousness.

Thus, those who do “not fit within the frames of comprehension” allow the master consciousness to define itself: they are what it is not, they are its limits; where they begin, the master consciousness ends, and where the master consciousness ends, they begin. With this recognition European man was able to define his own “humanity,” which he then extended to humanity in general, and on this register justified marginalization, colonization, and, as a last resort, murder and erasure. Despite its best efforts, however, the notion of humanity that Europe appropriated, Zea suggests, is a relativistic one; the Eurocentric notion of humanity that the subjugation of the New World made possible is one that is colored, and gendered, and grounded on difference—namely, the European difference. “The points of view of the West,” he says, “although they may be rooted in the reality of which they are an expression, are considered as the delimiting points of view of humanity itself” (196). Liberation from these relativistic and self-serving world views will lie in

appealing to a vision of humanity that is not Western, nor relativistic, but transcendent. He writes, "Humanity is not what separates or distinguishes, but what makes similar. . . . That is, simply humanity, concrete humanity" (195).

The task, then, is to liberate oneself from the prejudicial rationality of a colonizing and imperialistic Western consciousness. This liberation becomes more urgent, moreover, when imperialist and colonizing points of view find themselves in crisis. "Crises," Zea observes, "always make evident the relativity of those valuations that seemed to be essential to humanity" (197). So the coming to consciousness of her own history together with the crises overwhelming the West half-way into the twentieth century opened a space of possibility for the Latin American, constituting a moment for freedom and self-assertion. In Hegelian parlance, the subjugated consciousness seeks its independence at the moment when it realizes its own strength (that it has its own historical identity) and while, simultaneously, the master consciousness hesitates before the demands of its own world (its historical crises).

### THE MEXICAN CASE

In Zea's Hegelian account of the struggle for recognition, Mexico (the country and the people) has played the role of the slave consciousness in the historical dialectic (particularly during the period of conquest and colonization). But this only means that Mexico has not been *outside* of history, but a necessary moment within it. Mexico is that on which the West depended for its own fulfillment, that which measured the limits of its own humanity, that onto which it could impose its philosophies, religions, logics, and dreams. As such, Western culture is founded on "the imposition of one culture over another; the imposition of one man's perspectives over the perspectives of others" (Zea 1952, 199). These impositions Zea calls "imperialism," and imperialism "gives rise to" [*a dado lugar a*] "colonialism," a lasting form of domination that operates by denying humanity and difference (198–202).

The persistence of imperialism and colonialism produce the problem of self-identity. This is shown in the manner in which, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mexicans eagerly internalized European values (aesthetic, political, and philosophical). This internalization meant that values somehow rooted in the Mexican circumstance—to history and a burgeoning mestizo culture—had to be ignored, erased, demeaned, and eventually sacrificed to ideologies of progress and modernity. Said differently, Mexicans came to believe, as Europeans had insisted, that their own historical survival depended on the negation of their *difference* and the adoption of ideologies, philosophies, and other strategies that transcended particularity and the traps of something other than a Western conception of reason and rationality.



These ideologies, philosophies, and strategies were captured by Mexicans of the nineteenth century under the concept of “*mexicanidad*.”<sup>7</sup> *Mexicanidad*, or “Mexicanness,” is said to refer to the rational kernel, or the *essence*, of what it means to be Mexican. *Mexicanidad*, as essence, thus fulfilled the rational requirements of European reason, as it conformed to its universalizing and transcendent aspirations. Mexicans, that is, believed themselves to have found the universal in the Mexican experience. As Zea puts it, “far from indicating a reduction of humanity, [mexicanness] becomes its most concrete expression” (202). And it is *its most concrete expression* because it refers to a universal essence, to something untampered-with by history or circumstance. But there was something greater at stake here: being on par with the rest of humanity also meant that Mexicans could “demand equality of rights” (202). However, as Zea points out, this is a false dialectical moment evidenced by the lack of recognition that followed.

The appeal to sameness in spite of difference makes of “this epoch the least Mexican in our history” (205). No longer in search of recognition as a distinct yet concrete human being, the Mexican seeks the “recognition of his sameness . . . through abstract and formal means” (205). Wanting to be similar, the Mexican negates her genuine identity in acts of imitation and erasure. Historically speaking, this is the moment when Mexicans seek their independence from Europe, and like adolescents who no longer have anything to learn from their parents, are confident that they can go it alone; the once-subjugated consciousness optimistically seeks to cut ties with the once-master consciousness. But this is a paradoxical struggle for independence: the Mexican liberates himself from the European colonizers only to subjugate himself to their ideologies and world-visions, for example, to the dream of modernity. This leads to a dialectical struggle within Mexico itself, one between the powerful and the powerless, the “modern” and the rest, where “the voices of concrete individuals are drowned in the name of Universal Humanity” (208).

This inner conflict gives rise to the next dialectical moment, wherein it is recognized that the “root of all our evils lies in that destructive inheritance of colonial customs and habits” (209). Some of these customs and habits echo the oppressive nature of the master consciousness, such as the appeal to universality in place of concrete existence, and others are a direct result of the trauma of colonialism, such as the refusal to confront the past instead living in it in a perpetual state of repetition and amnesia. Both lead to the alienation and marginalization of others, with whom complicity and solidarity becomes an impossibility. If others represent the possibility of the future, then this alienating and marginalizing attitude toward others means that there is no future for Mexico. But these others, repressed by the voices of universal humanity and abstract progress, must of necessity make themselves known.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 is the critical historical moment of this struggle.

The Mexican Revolution signals the material fracture of Mexican history and the final antithesis of a Western *Begriff*<sup>8</sup> that positioned itself as the absolute interpretive framework for human existence. The Revolution broke through the humanistic abstractions to reveal the concrete death of the other, who was not other, but the same, a brother, a sister, a friend, another Mexican. Zea characterizes the revelatory power of the Revolution as follows:

The Mexican Revolution revealed to the Mexican aspects of herself that dominant groups had previously endeavored to hide. An almost ancestral world bursts forth as if by magic [*como por encanto*] obliterating that ridiculous and simple world that the Porfirio Díaz regime [*el Porfiriato*] had elevated. With this Revolution an authentic return of man into himself is initiated. First the painters and the poets, now the philosophers continue the project of revealing authentic humanity [*el hombre sin más*]; a concrete human being, but a human nonetheless, as human as those humans from other cultures and other continents. (213)

The Revolution was a critical moment of self-consciousness and, through its violent spontaneity, a truly authentic antithesis to the *colonial* Notion of humanity and truth—one that defined humanity at the limits of barbarism and the self-assuredness of uniqueness. Before this moment, the Mexican, overpowered by this Notion, had hidden behind images concocted by the Western imaginary. Now, in the aftermath of a concrete struggle that revealed the violent and material death of the familiar other, the Mexican aims to replace those notions and those images with ideals and projects that are uniquely Mexican, rooted in the Mexican soil, structured by and *for* Mexican history.

The new dialectical struggle will be one that reveals not what one is, Zea says, “but what one must be” (214–15). But this call, the call to pursue one’s proper excellence, must come from a trustworthy voice, from one who is not held in suspicion but is esteemed as a compatriot or a neighbor, someone who can articulate an understandable conception of *what one must be* because she also knows that *we are in this together*. This is complicity, and it requires access to a common history of struggle and a common vision of overcoming. He reaffirms the necessity for complicity four decades later, in his *Discourse from Marginality and Barbarism* of 1988. There, complicity is conceptualized as “reconciliation”:

the struggle can be overcome if this struggle is raised to the level of consciousness and individuals act in accordance with the inescapable relation of individuals with individuals; if one acts, that is, in solidarity, which does not imply the surrender of one will to another, but the reconciliation of what one wants or what others want. (Zea 1988, 19)

It is this theme, of complicity among difference, which ties together Zea's appropriation of Hegel. Elsewhere, in "Hispanic-America: Labyrinth of Cultures," Zea laments that rather than contributing to their own historical struggle, Mexicans in particular and Latin Americans in general have found themselves paralyzed by their marginalization at the hands of a "culture of which they feel themselves heirs," namely, European culture (Zea 1949, 324). What they need, he says, is a "project of assimilation" that will lead them back to their authentic origins (325). This project is a project of solidarity involving a complicity of desires ("the reconciliation of what one wants or what others want") and rooted in what's authentically, and concretely, one's own, that is, one's historical and cultural difference. This is a major departure from Hegel, for whom difference was there to be consumed in the dialectical process. Mario Sáenz best describes Zea's departure from Hegel when he writes: "while in Hegel all otherness is ideally negated as well in that fashion (for all otherness is alienation from the self), that is not the case with Zea, for whom the circumstantiality of life prevents precisely such a kind of all-encompassing synthesis" (1999, 96).

And thus, with his insistence on difference as a remainder, the possibility of historicizing the past, and the decentering of Eurocentric rationality as the arbiter of humanity, Zea repackages Hegel for the sake of Mexican, and Latin American, intellectual liberation.

## CREOLIZING HEGEL

Ultimately, the reason why Hegel situated America outside history was because the conception of reason that he was working with could not account for the rationalities of the peoples it found to be other to the European. With Zea, these other rationalities are re-inserted into a broader rationality that is both inclusive and seemingly nonrational to a specifically Eurocentric way of thinking.

Michael Monahan describes a process that challenges the status of "purity" as "creolizing," so that the *creolizing subject* is one whose identity is not pure but dynamic, plastic, ambiguous, and always in a process of becoming (Monahan 2011, 190). If we consider Hegel's philosophy of history, as Zea does, as the *pure* articulation of Eurocentric rationality, that in its purity authorized itself to justify the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, the powerful and the powerless, thus justifying the rationality of colonialism, then Zea's self-serving appropriation of Hegel, wherein Hegel's account is retrofitted to account for otherness and difference, is a *creolizing* of Hegel. This becomes evident in Zea's appeal to the Hegelian dialectical method as a source of empowerment for the very same people that Hegel's

original proclamations aimed to exclude. Zea's is neither a faithful reading of Hegel nor is it a devastating critique. He is not a Hegelian, nor is he an anti-Hegelian. Zea straddles that middle-ground that allows him the freedom to be properly historical and genuinely concrete.

For the sake of closing the narrative circle, I'd like to conclude with another of Žižek's cryptic observations regarding Hegel. He says:

The position of Absolute Knowledge, the final reconciliation, plays here the role of the Hegelian Thing: a monster both frightening and ridiculous, from which it is best to keep some distance, something that is at the same time impossible (Absolute Knowledge is of course unachievable, an unrealizable Ideal) and forbidden (Absolute Knowledge must be avoided, for it threatens to mortify all the richness of life through the self-movement of the concept). In other words, any attempt to define oneself within Hegel's sphere of influence requires a point of blocked identification—the Thing must always be sacrificed. (2015)

Said differently and less enigmatically, Hegel's philosophy, represented by the monstrous Absolute, or we could say, by the *final purity*, cannot be faced without resistance, if it must be faced at all. We can say that Zea faced the Thing and survived by doing precisely what Žižek suggests we do, namely, by sacrificing the closure of purity for the sake of difference, particularity, and a historical identity that seemed at one point inconceivable and of the future. Ultimately, the future is made present in the process of creolizing Hegel, which is both a process of empowerment and a process of liberation.

## NOTES

1. This is a hope expressed by Octavio Paz, in his *Labyrinth of Solitude*, who says that stripping oneself of illusions and bad faith, and thus recognizing our fundamental solitude, will allow one to welcome and be welcomed by the rest of humanity, who are, like us, "solitary beings." When this happens, we can say: "For the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all mankind" (1988, 194).

2. This is the text of a lecture delivered in March 1951 and published in Zea (1952).

3. Zea's *El Positivismo en México*, published in the early 1940, was heavily criticized by US historians who argued that a Zea, as a Mexican, couldn't be objective about Mexican history, which "impose certain limitation on the reliability of his work as an intellectual historian" (Zea 1974, xvi). They insisted that the capacity for objectivity, especially about Mexico, belonged to non-Mexicans. This critique is not unlike Hegel's, whose patriarchal-imperialist view would insist that Mexicans cannot do anything for themselves.

4. It is worth noting that this "prerequisite" for awakening was imposed on other "primitive" races, such as Africans and Asians. However, there is a sense in which

Hegel considered the Indigenous races of the Americas as more in need of the civilizing project. In Part III of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, for instance, Hegel attributes dialectical significance to the races of the Old World, particularly, the Negro and the Mongolian races, while saying of the New World races that they are “weak, vanishing” (cited in Parekh 2009, 119). Thus, even among the dominated and colonized peoples, the peoples of the Americas “fall behind in their historical formation” or *Bildung* (117).

5. As Ofelia Schutte notes: “The marginalization of non-European peoples with respect to Europeans, [Zea] thinks, is related to a Eurocentric view of reason, which leads to the perception that non-Western people are inferior to Europeans in their capacity to reason, hence, in their status as human beings” (Schutte 1993, 86).

6. The reason as to why Zea narrows his focus in such a way is not documented. However, one thing we do know is that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* was very popular among the young intelligentsia, with Jorge Portilla leading seminars out of his kitchen in the late 1940s (see Sánchez 2012, esp. ch. 1) and José Gaos delivering more “official” lectures at the National University (published as Gaos 1956). More importantly, the popularity is the fact that the Master-Slave dialectic lends itself as an analytical tool to investigate relations of oppression between the Old World and the New.

7. Here, Zea, like his contemporaries, referred the Mexican in the masculine sense. And indeed, a great many criticisms have been leveled against Mexican philosophy of *lo mexicano* for its evasion of the feminine voice, the feminine struggle, and the role of the feminine in Mexican culture—in other words, for its male-centeredness. But here, in this abstract rendition of Mexican history and the individual’s purchase of a consciousness of liberation, the distinction falls to the wayside. “Lo mexicano” refers to Mexican life in all its sexes, genders, colors, and classes. That it, in fact, *should not* refer to these things is a matter beyond the scope of the present chapter.

8. Kojève (1980) defines the “Notion,” as found in Hegel, as a “conceptually understood reality.”



## *Chapter Eleven*

### **Crossing Boundaries**

#### *Hegel, de Beauvoir, and hooks on Exclusion and Identity*

Shannon M. Mussett

What could the Hegelian dialectic contribute to the discussion of oppression when the exclusion and domination of the feminine and non-white permeates its performance? bell hooks, for example, unreservedly rejects “either/or dualistic thinking” because it “is the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western Society” (hooks 1981, 29). The Hegelian dialectic, enacting the production and consequent mediation of the self through otherness, is notably saturated with dualisms which construct, alienate, and utilize those deemed to be other to the self. Yet, dialectical thinking is unique in its ability to both cause the problem hooks illuminates and provide a strategy for rooting out and critiquing oppressive structures. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, shows how the dialectical movement of consciousness tends to fix women as alienated existents—forcing them into the role of the excluded yet necessary support for the advancement of patriarchal culture. For hooks, even this formulation fails to take into account the realities of sexist oppression of black women. At first glance, it would appear that Hegel, or even de Beauvoir, would have little to offer hooks, whose philosophy runs against the traditional grain. And yet, when these three figures come into contact on the mechanics of dialectical movement, new ways for exploring marginalizing ideologies emerge.

In fact, in the spirit of creolization, hooks turns out to be an excellent interlocutor with both Hegel and the Hegelianism of de Beauvoir. As she describes her own project she openly refuses to be put into an academic category. Rather, she crosses “boundaries to take another look, to contest, to interrogate, and in some cases to recover and redeem,” all the while acknowledging “how difficult it is to cross boundaries in this white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society” which demands isolation and domination in spheres of thought and discourse (hooks 206, 5–6). hooks inspires us to reject the borders of thought that police academic and theoretical discourse, thus embodying the



essence of creolization. It is from this perspective that I propose a reading of Hegel, de Beauvoir, and hooks that is both inspired by the Hegelian movement of dialectical thinking and suspicious of its exclusionary performances.

In order to explore the dialectic as it impacts feminist thought, it is crucial to hold both a constructive and critical relationship to it, illustrating how Hegelianism functions as a challenge to sexist and racist oppression as well as an acute reproduction of central aspects of it. As hooks notes, the particularly virulent forms of sexism, racism, and classism that are supported in the West

have been primarily informed by Western philosophy. They can be best understood within a Western context, not via an evolutionary model of human development. Within our society, all forms of oppression are supported by traditional Western thinking. The primary contradiction in Western cultural thought is the belief that the superior should control the inferior. (hooks 2000, 36)

Taking this criticism seriously—both insofar as it can show us what to reject and how to assess the challenges—I focus on points of concord as well as discord with all three thinkers. Hegel provides us with an understanding of the production and role of otherness, specifically, in the form of the feminine and the African continent. de Beauvoir adopts a distinctly Hegelian notion of identity as formed through antagonism and struggle, while sharply scrutinizing the ways in which women have come to occupy the place of the “Other” in patriarchal culture. For all of its value, however, de Beauvoir eclipses the figure of the black woman even as she purports to write for the situation of women as such. hooks’ attacks on white feminism, which trace the occlusion of black femininity, is not working directly in terms of the Hegelian dialectic. In fact, she eschews metaphysics largely because of its exclusionary and elitist language, which, in its very enactment, produces the rejected other. Yet, I maintain that their meeting—both through and outside de Beauvoir’s philosophy—reopens perspectives that are in line with hooks’ analysis and ultimate goals in the struggle for liberation. To explore this dynamic, this chapter addresses all three thinkers on the problem of identity and exclusion, with particular focus on the themes of the natural, the feminine, and race.

### **THE HEGELIAN OTHER: NATURE, THE FEMININE, AND AFRICA**

As detailed by Michael Monahan’s Introduction to this collection, speculative reason in Hegel upsets the dichotomous nature of oppositional thinking through its continual process of positing, sublating, and re-positing difference (Monahan 2017, 10). Such a movement is itself creolizing insofar as it ruptures closed systems and overcomes limitations by virtue of reason’s own

restlessness. This movement, far from being a mere annihilation of difference, is actually the preservation of difference in a higher unity as well as the principle by which the higher unity breaks into more oppositions.<sup>1</sup> Because this new unity preserves contradiction, it is a creative and transgressive force. If the differences were merely cancelled, reason would repose. However, reason is always restlessly engendering new ideas and experiences.<sup>2</sup> Of course, this difference is *self-generated*, thus opening a space for concern about what, if anything, is *truly* different. Hegel elaborates:

On account of its simplicity or self-identity it appears fixed and enduring. But this self-identity is no less negativity; therefore, its fixed existence passes over into its dissolution. The determinateness seems at first to be due entirely to the fact that it is related to an *other*, and its movement seems imposed on it by an alien power; *but having its otherness within itself, and being self-moving*, is just what is involved in this simplicity of thinking itself. (Hegel 1977, 34; emphasis mine)

Just as thought thinks it has delimited and determined the boundaries of that which it seeks to grasp, it dissolves into a new problematic, opposed to a new antithesis. In essence then, the system is never closed, but remains constantly self-troubling and creative.

The movements of alienation and mediation figure centrally in Hegelian philosophy as they allow for the occurrence of all historical and spiritual change, development, and progress. For Hegel, the self externalizes (or alienates) itself so that it can proceed to mediate itself through its other. The movement of alienation is necessary in Hegelian philosophy and often, albeit not without its monumental failures, eventually leads to self-education and a higher shape of spirit. However, a problem emerges from within this formulation of the dialectic. If alienation and mediation are entirely the work of the subject (even if only originally unconsciously so), then there is a decidedly optimistic tint to the dialectic; so long as the subject is *self-alienating* and mediating through an otherness that is internally generated, then the upward spiral to greater self-conscious freedom is all but guaranteed. However, if we think of alienation and mediation as not exercised *by* the self but *on* the self from without, we very quickly see the production of an other who serves as a kind of permanently excluded outside. Such an exclusion produces a boundary by which the self- generating subject can more clearly demarcate its identity.

Perhaps the clearest and most accessible formulation of the way in which exclusion and alienation function in the mechanics of othering can be seen in the master-slave dialectic.<sup>3</sup> Here we find the alienated consciousness bifurcated into two seemingly separate shapes (the master and the slave) that face each other as profoundly unequal existents. Having lost the battle for essentiality in the confrontation for sovereignty, the slave clings to (natural) life and accepts the yoke of servitude rather than risk the loss of life in a violent

battle to the death. In the most famous dialectical inversion in Hegelian philosophy, the slave eventually “wins” its freedom through the lessons it learns in confronting death and in laboring on the material world at the behest of the master. Hegel explains that through laboring, the slave becomes the essential consciousness—a freedom which remained implicit but not concretely expressed (Hegel 1977, 118). In other words, the slave becomes conscious of itself as a force of negativity that forms, shapes, and changes the world in a way that the master, who merely consumes, does not (Hegel 1977, 118). In short, although slavery may be abhorrent in its practice, it is a necessary moment in the development from consciousness to self-consciousness. This observation of the necessity of consciousness positing its other and confronting it in terms of hostility, domination, and even enslavement is a central problem that we will explore through de Beauvoir and hooks below.

The second observation concerning exclusion and identity formation can be found in Hegel’s discussion of nature. The slave is both the denigrated *other* consciousness and the consciousness that is tied most intimately to nature (Hegel 1977, 114).<sup>4</sup> In clinging to natural life, the slave chooses not to risk all in the assertion of freedom. However, what nature is for Hegel is more clearly understood in the second volume of his three-part *Encyclopedia, The Philosophy of Nature*. Here, what is natural or of nature is that which exists in a state of externality from the inner truth of the idea. Nature, as pure externality, is in many senses the *absolute* other. Nature results from Spirit externalizing itself, wholly *othering* itself, so that it can mediate through its absolute other in order to know itself through it. Hegel explains:

Nature has presented itself as the Idea in the form of *otherness*. Since therefore the Idea is the negative of itself, or is *external to itself*, Nature is not merely external in relation to this Idea (and to its subjective existence Spirit); the truth is rather that *externality* constitutes the specific character in which Nature, as Nature, exists. (Hegel 1970, 13–14)

Spirit must overcome this externality in order to make what appears to be absolutely other, merely the alienated and eventually recuperated self. It should come as no surprise then that such a formulation of nature will have enormous consequences on those human beings deemed to be more “natural”—in the case of de Beauvoir this designation falls squarely on women, and in the case of hooks, we find this concept haunting the African slave experience.

Hegel emphasizes that nature is characterized by externality—is, so to speak, *externality as such*. This means that nature lacks self-conscious self-determination. The focus on externality underscores how nature forms the border between the self and the world. Nature functions as a border between the inner truth of the subject and that which is outside, alien, and only

implicitly rational. This depiction of nature as externality emphasizes the natural sphere as wholly other to both the idea and spirit. Nature therefore serves as the other through which the idea must pass in order to return to itself in the complete philosophical movement of spirit; in itself, however, nature constitutes a site of negativity, untruth, and contingency.

Nature as the absolute other forms a fascinating middle point in the Hegelian encyclopedic system. However, it becomes more menacing when we see the way that more “natural” existents become externalized absolutely for the purposes of both maintaining the system and for serving as its boundaries. As it turns out, nature, for Hegel, is not merely *absolutely* other to Spirit because it *is* Spirit itself lost in externality. Thus, we must also understand that nature is *implicitly* rational—Spirit overcoming its own self-alienation to return to itself. This configuration of nature as both other and implicitly self allows Hegel not only to feminize nature but also to configure the feminine as such in similar terms. Regarding the feminine, for example, Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* feminizes nature in multiple ways. As feminine, nature is *implicitly* rational, yet must be brought to explicit rationality through the idealizing movement of spirit. Whereas “the Idea is present in each grade or level of Nature itself . . . Nature is however, only implicitly the Idea” (Hegel 1970, 14). Thus, spirit liberates nature from irrationality through knowing and experiencing it. Hegel writes: “implicitly she [Nature] is Reason, but it is through Spirit that Reason as such first emerges from Nature into existence. Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he looked on Eve: ‘this is the flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone.’ Thus Nature is the bride which Spirit weds” (Hegel 1970, 13).

The feminization of nature as implicitly rational has social and political repercussions in the formulation of the feminine as that which is implicitly rational and which requires the guiding hand of masculine rationality to justify and elevate it. For example, in *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes, “The difference in the physical characteristics of the two sexes has a rational basis and consequently acquires an intellectual and ethical significance” (Hegel 1967a, 114). In other words, Hegel believes in a rational basis for sexual difference that carries with it an entire structure of mental and practical consequences. He writes:

One sex is mind in its self-diremption into explicit personal self-subsistence and the knowledge and volition of free universality. . . . The other sex is mind maintaining itself in unity as knowledge and volition of the substantive . . . in the form of concrete individuality and feeling. In relation to externality, the former is powerful and active, the latter passive and subjective. It follows that man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself. . . .

Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family. (Hegel 1967a, 114)

According to this rational division found in organic beings *and* social practices, men engage in active struggle with the external world of universal ends, whereas women are enclosed in passivity and the subjective feeling of the family. Through “labor and struggle” men actively rupture the quietude of the given, whereas women maintain the tranquility of the family. What is simply a division between the spiritual human and the natural world in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* actually forms the foundation of the political divisions of men and women in society. In any case, whether discussing the feminine, the natural, or the rational basis for the social division of the sexes, the placement of the feminine-natural remains external—that is, *outside yet supportive* of the power of self-conscious, masculine, subjective spirit.

Hegel’s understanding of identity and exclusion has implications not only on sex and gender but also on the construction and operation of race. Nowhere is this more evident than in Hegel’s discussion of Africa and its people. As I have discussed elsewhere, Hegelian dialectical thought ascribes this implicit but undeveloped rationality not only to nature and the feminine but also to Africa, which he describes as the entirely *unhistorical* continent in order to provide a cultural negative for Europe (Mussett 2003).<sup>5</sup> In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel claims that Africa, as the unhistorical continent, is “undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature” (Hegel 1956, 99). He further describes Africans as having a “natural soul,” because they are tied to the geography, climate, and landscape, unlike Europeans who benefit from ideal geographical conditions for the expression of self-determining Spirit. From the perspective of world history, all of Africa is locked up in a perpetual state of childhood, “enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (Hegel 1956, 91). The resulting characterizations of Africans are, not surprisingly, equally damning and historically inaccurate.<sup>6</sup> For example, in the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel maintains that Africans are a “race of children,” whose intelligence is dormant, making no historical progress (Hegel 1971, 42–43). In a similar move with the feminine, there is an implicit rationality that exists in Africa, thus legitimizing the European impetus to “save” the unhistorical beings who live there through colonialization and enslavement. Because of their lack of self-control, their childlike naiveté, their undervaluation of humanity, and their general acceptance of tyranny as normal and natural, the burden is upon Europe and self-actualized world historical Spirit to circle around to Africa. Only then can Africa overcome its unhistorical status and join the ranks of the truly human.

Because they exist in the state of nature and exhibit no cultural development, any and all contact between Africa and Europe, no matter how violent,

will only benefit Africans: because “the only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery. we may conclude *slavery* to have been the occasion of the increase in human feeling among the Negroes” (Hegel 1956, 79).<sup>7</sup> After all, Africans prove to be well adapted to slavery because of their natural, childlike character and their acceptance of political tyranny. As Hegel understands the child (like the feminine, like nature itself, like the entire African continent) to be only *implicitly* rational, it is “the most inappropriate for mind, simply because it is still an abstract, immediate reality in the natural sphere” (Hegel 1971, 21). Through enslaving the most childlike of people, there is hope in bringing them into full-grown cultural adulthood.<sup>8</sup> Creating a link to his overall phenomenological perspective, we can see that through enslavement, Africans will learn the lessons of the beginnings of self-consciousness so vital to Hegel’s system as found in the master-slave dialectic.

This brief foray into the Hegelian dialectic allows us to draw the following conclusions: the human domination of nature is the only guarantee for nature to be liberated from itself, masculine domination over feminine passivity is the only rational social arrangement, and literal enslavement is the only guarantee for eventual spiritual liberation of Africans.

## DE BEAUVOIR READING WITH AND AGAINST HEGEL

As discussed above, alienation and externalization are central to the Hegelian dialectic such that consciousness cannot develop on both the individual and the cultural level without it. What happens when we take the above discussions of externalization and nature and shift the focus specifically toward the role of the feminine? Here is where de Beauvoir is most helpful. The connection between Hegel and de Beauvoir on identity formation is not an unfamiliar one.<sup>9</sup> The question that must be confronted from the position of race and sex is clear: is this exclusionary and confrontational structure in consciousness universal or simply a cultural idiom made cosmopolitan? Because if it is the former, then human identity requires that certain existents, classes, and peoples be thrust out of the dialectical movement entirely such that they become permanently marginalized, alienated, and/or externalized.

In the *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir’s analysis of women’s oppression devotes considerable energy to showing that Hegelian alienation is not simply a process of *self*-othering but can in fact lead to a loss of self and a degradation of those fixed as the *absolute* Other. As she discovers, throughout history women have been configured as alienated existents in the sense of never attaining the vital Hegelian moment of self-recovery. Their alienation as the “Other” sex leads to their utilization by patriarchal institutions and individuals

for ends not their own. Man, who has the power of definition on his side, does not consider woman “positively, as she is for herself, but negatively, such as she appears to man” (de Beauvoir 2010, 162). Even if she feels herself to be a positive existence, she lacks the creative power of self-definition and thus finds herself living a derivative and posited existence.<sup>10</sup> Positioned as thoroughly Other to man, woman becomes necessary to him as his *absolute limit*, not as an equal existent. Man defines himself as being *not*-woman, just as thought defines itself as being *not*-nature. Both woman and nature remain in a contradiction—completely external to the power of thought, yet intimately connected to that which defines them as such. de Beauvoir’s woman suffers a similar kind of powerlessness and emptiness in her alienated existence as the Other; she “is divided and torn” because she cannot complete the circuit of identity (de Beauvoir 2010, 734).

de Beauvoir largely adopts the Kojévian reading of Hegel on the nature and function of otherness, antagonism, and violence in the struggle for recognition.<sup>11</sup> She does not contest the desire of human beings to subjugate each other. She agrees with Hegel that consciousness has an imperialistic drive to assert mastery over its world and especially other consciousnesses. She believes that consciousness not only utilizes the category of the other in experience, but that it seeks to dominate this other as well. In fact, de Beauvoir claims that “the temptation to dominate is the most universal and the most irresistible there is” (de Beauvoir 2010, 499).<sup>12</sup> de Beauvoir’s Hegelianism is most apparent when she argues that things “become clear if, following Hegel, a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself; the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object” (de Beauvoir 2010, 7). In both Hegel and de Beauvoir, self-consciousness requires an originally antithetical “other” that must be objectified. The fact that women are oppressed is therefore not so surprising as consciousness is imperialistic by nature. Yet, although de Beauvoir uses much of Hegel’s theory to formulate her own philosophy of consciousness and interpersonal relations, she is not unaware of some of its deeply problematic aspects, particularly its movement toward oppression.

In oppression, “transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals” by external forces (de Beauvoir 1997, 81). Oppression is the enforced marginalization and objectification of one existent by another such that the oppressed is “reduced to pure facticity, congealed in his immanence, cut off from his future, deprived of his transcendence and of the world which that transcendence discloses” (de Beauvoir 1997, 100). By the time she turns her attention to the oppression of women in *The Second Sex*, it becomes clear that oppression is a much larger problem than she originally imagined it to be.



Part of the problem of woman's oppression lies in the way that the feminine has been historically categorized in the West as more "natural." One of the cornerstones of de Beauvoir's argument is that, reminiscent of Hegel, man defines woman as "natural," rather than a social or political being.<sup>13</sup> When human thinking was undeveloped and nature appeared as a dominating, alien force, man equated all of nature with woman: not only were the two similar in their cyclic and life-giving powers, but in women "the whole of foreign Nature is concentrated" (de Beauvoir 2010, 79). For de Beauvoir, the obvious problem in this equation of woman with nature is that in conquering nature, man also conquers woman (de Beauvoir 2010, 84). His advances in technology and agriculture further his progressive domination over nature's external forces *and* his domination of woman, whom he now believes to be nature's representative. In short, man's progress takes place *against* nature and woman.<sup>14</sup> Such placement of women at the margins of the human and the natural—participating in many ways in both spheres—leads directly to their oppression.

Woman and nature serve as the outside or boundary to men and spirit. Because of their associations with nature, de Beauvoir argues that women have been forced to carry the burdens of the immanent aspects of life while being denied the fundamentally transcendent activities necessary for the expression and cultivation of reason. As such, they have been forced into the same kind of contradictory and irrational existence characterized by the Hegelian conception of nature. Such an existence is not unlike a forced infantilization that affects not only women but the enslaved as well:

There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like the child, they can exercise their freedom, but only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them. This is the case, for example, of slaves who have not raised themselves to the consciousness of their slavery. The southern planters were not altogether wrong in considering the negroes who docilely submitted to their paternalism as "grown-up children." . . . This is also the situation of women in many civilizations; they can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths created by the males. (de Beauvoir 1997, 37)

de Beauvoir makes an important claim in the above passage in that there are many people whose situations are such that the expression of their freedom is always kept at the infantile state. Perhaps we can hear the echoes of Hegel's belief that children and slaves are only implicitly rational and thus require contact with rational adults on the one hand and European enlightenment on the other. Regardless, de Beauvoir is far more attuned to the inherent problems with this kind of understanding and treatment of *both* women and slaves.

For example, slaves and many women throughout the world are forced to obey values and laws that they themselves do not create, thus their coming in to “rationality” is merely the adoption of white European patriarchal ideology. According to de Beauvoir, their situation actually *prohibits* them from making any other kind of choice and thus cannot be understood in terms of living in *bad faith* or inauthenticity.<sup>15</sup> de Beauvoir is clear that those people who are forced to live a childlike existence are *not* living in bad faith, even if they are not actively taking up their freedom in any kind of definite project. For those who are made to live in a world where others give their roles and values to them, their situation is rather one of mystification and oppression. This treatment of those marginalized into the position of Other is often the result of a dialectical thinking that upholds the primacy of European masculine reason and its world-historical task to bring what is irrational into line.

de Beauvoir explicitly rebukes Hegel on his conception of the historical progress toward the absolute.<sup>16</sup> In fact, regarding Hegel’s orientation toward a future absolute, de Beauvoir comes dangerously close to calling the Hegelian system fascist in its motivations: “the whole system seems like a huge mystification, since it subordinates all its moments to an end term whose coming it dares not set up; the individual renounces himself; but no reality in favor of which he can renounce himself is ever affirmed or recovered” (de Beauvoir 1997, 105–6). If the system is a process of mystification wherein individual ends are subordinate to an abstract goal—such as the realization of freedom on a universal level—then Hegel’s philosophy does not in fact aid in the realization of freedom, rather, it ushers in a massive obfuscation that can be used for nefarious ends.<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of de Beauvoir, the realization of a Hegelian freedom requires the naturalization and domination of the feminine Other. In addition, if we recall Hegel’s formulation of Africa as the entirely unhistorical continent, filled with humans who are childlike and by nature comfortable with tyranny, then we can see this same move used to justify colonialization and slavery. But to make this point, we must now turn to hooks.

### THE HOOKSIAN OTHER: NATURE, THE FEMININE, AND AFRICA

hooks offers a critique of the kind of dualistic thinking that she believes underlies the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy dominant in the United States. Although hooks does not explicitly take up a critique of Hegelian philosophy, her approach allows us to use the method of creolization to analyze some of its most problematic aspects. In this spirit, I use hooks’ philosophy to accomplish two tasks in this concluding analysis. First, I highlight the African

slave experience from the perspective of female slaves in her book, *Ain't I a Woman?*, in order to show how any claims that Hegel may have had to justify colonialism and slavery crumble when looked at from the perspective of the suffering existents who were most directly affected; second, I return to de Beauvoir's own critical appropriation of Hegelian philosophy which becomes itself fraught with problems when seen from the perspective of *Black* women, rather than *all* women.

To begin, I want to return to the optimism of the Hegelian overcoming of nature as externality and the realization of freedom from its implicit to its explicit realization from the perspective of those who were excluded and abused by it. hooks discusses this in terms of marginalization. In the preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, she writes, "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the body," thus providing a Janus-faced position into the heart of power as well as into its rejected outside (hooks 2000, xvi). hooks forces the reader to begin on the outside—both theoretically and materially—with those who serve the dominant culture rather than those who hold a privileged position within it. In some ways, we can find a parallel with de Beauvoir's discussion of the exclusion of woman through her positioning as the absolute Other to male subject formation. And yet, hooks alerts us to the gross oversimplification of such a mass grouping of "women" and "men." Although the two feminists share a concern with the workings of alienation, marginalization, and social and material exclusion due to dualistic identity formation, hooks shows how it is never so clear as a simple split between self and other. Nowhere is this more distinct than in hooks' description of the black female slave experience, which brings together all of the problematic ways in which Hegel characterizes slavery, women, nature, and Africa as a whole.

hooks directly challenges a kind of Hegelian belief in the natural naiveté of Africans and their willing acceptance of tyranny as a natural state of affairs. She observes that the docility of Africans was a process brutally enacted upon them from the moment they were captured and brought onto the slave ships. This initial trauma was the beginning of

an indoctrination process that would transform the African personality aboard the ships so that it would be marketable as a "docile" slave in the American colonies. The prideful, arrogant, and independent spirit of the African people had to be broken so that they would conform to the white colonizers' notion of proper slave demeanor. (hooks 1981, 19)

In other words, directly challenging the Eurocentric justification for slavery seen in Hegel's philosophy, hooks points out that Africans already thought of themselves as free and had to "repress" this awareness in order to adopt the image needed to justify the practices of slavery. In fact, hooks indicates

a *reverse* movement of spirit from what Hegel claims. Africans, rather than being entirely unfree children, are in fact free human beings who have to *unlearn* their self-understanding upon contact with Euro-American slavers.<sup>18</sup> Of course, as hooks is acutely aware, the kind of image of Africa held by Hegel is needed by the African slave trade in order to support the sale, abuse, violation, forced breeding, rape, and objectification of black bodies in general and black female bodies in particular.

Although in her earlier works hooks is concerned with the contemporary place of women of color along the margins, she is mindful that this marginalization is directly tied to the historical practices of slavery. Rejecting what she finds to be an overemphasis on the black *male* slave experience, she underscores how sexism and racism equally damaged black women:

Institutionalized sexism—that is, patriarchy—formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands, and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women. (hooks 1981, 15)

The black female slave experience highlights some of the greatest excesses of racism and sexism for hooks: “while racism was clearly the evil that had decreed black people would be enslaved, it was sexism that determined that the lot of the black female slave would be harsher, more brutal than that of the black male slave” (hooks 1981, 43). If we recall the feminization of nature in Hegelian philosophy and its utilization in the system whereby it calls for its cultivation by rationality, we see the meeting of the domination of nature and the domination of Africa in the figure of the black female slave. In a sense, African female slaves present a double justification for their enslavement—as women they justify the supremacy of the active male over the passive female principle, and as Africans, they justify the authority of the fully actualized European spirit over the childlike African soul. One could say that black women exhibit a particularly concentrated form of Otherness insofar as they represent the negation of the most purified (white male) form of human being.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas de Beauvoir illustrates the many ways in which women come to occupy the space of the natural other to the male self, hooks goes even further by showing how the naturalization of the other harms black women specifically. Because “slave women were not ‘real’ women but were masculinized sub-human creatures” (hooks 1981, 71), black women, even after slavery, were conceived by white women and men as “sexual savages” and “non-human(s)” (hooks 1981, 52). Thus, black women appear as both doubly visible and doubly invisible. Their visibility results in a heightening of their

femaleness (and the ensuing sexual and sexualized abuse they suffer) *and* their blackness (and the racist exclusion from the human community that precipitated from slavery). But these same circumstances also produced a kind of invisibility—as women they did not gain parity with the rational male principle, and as black they did not figure in the ideal of white supremacy, thus erasing their voices in struggles for sexual *and* racial equality. This latter omission is clear from the treatment of all African slaves and the racist practices that hounded liberation movements long after manumission. Regarding the struggle for *sexual* equality, hooks takes issue with white feminists specifically for contributing to the erasure of black women.

In many ways, hooks shares a Beauvoirian-Hegelian understanding of how oppression works; she is simply critical of the idea that the desire for mastery is *natural* to consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Instead, she believes that such a desire is thoroughly Western and thus contingent on historical circumstances. Any system of domination (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) “relies on socializing everyone to believe that in all human relations there is an inferior and a superior party” (hooks 2000, 97). Thus, in one and the same breath, she can both agree with de Beauvoir’s critique of the unequal division of the sexes and disagree with the necessity of dualistic thinking which facilitates unfair and violent cultural practices. This insistence on dualistic thinking is largely to blame for the glaring omission of black women from feminist discourse.<sup>21</sup> The problem, hooks observes, is that feminist theory does not emerge from those who are most victimized.

Although the shared vision of identity formation through the self-other dynamic evident in both de Beauvoir and Hegel is a useful framework for evaluating the generic position of women *as such* in Western culture, hooks’ work immediately brings the stark limitations of this model in representing the situation of all women. In *Feminist Theory*, she writes:

No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group “women” in this culture. When black people are talked about, sexism militates against the acknowledgment of the interests of black women; when women are talked about racism militates against a recognition of black female interests. When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *white* women. No where is this more evident than in the vast body of feminist literature. (hooks 1981, 7)

hooks here describes the double erasure of black women—they are not included in the group “women” with feminists, or with “black” in struggles against racist oppression. She continues in her criticisms of white feminists: “The most glaring example of their support of the exclusion of

black women was revealed when they drew analogies between ‘women’ and ‘blacks’ when what they were really comparing was the social status of white women with that of black people” (ibid.). The analogy between the oppression of “women” and “blacks” equates all women with bourgeois white women who dominate the literary and political scene, and with black men—both as representatives of American slavery and as those primarily spearheading suffrage and civil rights.

For all of its value, de Beauvoir’s white feminism also eclipses the figure of the black woman—in body and in thought—even as she continuously draws parallels between the plight of (white) women and black (men). When viewed from hooks’ critical perspective, de Beauvoir’s philosophy of the oppression of women becomes deeply problematic. Take, for example, the following passage from *The Second Sex*:

there are deep analogies between the situations of women and blacks: both are liberated today from the same paternalism, and the former master caste wants to keep them “in their place,” that is, the place chosen for them; in both cases, they praise, more or less sincerely, the virtues of the “good black,” the care-free, childlike, merry soul of the resigned black, and the woman who is a “true woman”—frivolous, infantile, irresponsible, the woman subjugated to man. (de Beauvoir 2010, 12)

Here we see the eclipse of the black woman laid bare in the very manner that hooks describes—the analogy between black men and white women functions to bring two disparate experiences together so that they are made to be almost identical.<sup>22</sup> Aside from the audacity of equating the experiences of black people living under the burdens of past slavery and contemporary racial violence and social exclusion, to the experiences of *all* modern women who live under the social yoke of being “good women,” de Beauvoir here enacts the double erasure of the black woman described above. Clearly, she is equating the experiences of *white women* and *black men*, rather than simply drawing an analogy between all whites and all blacks.<sup>23</sup>

de Beauvoir offers a striking critique of the ways in which social forces condemn certain groups to inferior positions and then use their status as a justification for their continued inferiority. Her mistake lies in her gross oversimplification of the *differences* in these practices. That all women have been conditioned (in many ways, mystified) into the subordinate role of the Other does not adequately explain the ways in which such conditioning and mystification play out in different social groups and individuals. Lisa Guenther points out that this kind of discourse of Otherness can serve as a “mask for uninterrogated privilege and colonial domination,” which, according to hooks, occurs when “words hide gaps and absences where other voices would be, if they were not excluded from the conversation in advance” (Guenther

2011, 196). This kind of omission is all the more damaging when it is done in the name of the people it attempts to celebrate. As hooks argues directly, black women were marginalized in the struggles against racism *and* sexism and their lack of collective organizing “was an indication that sexist-racist socialization had effectively brainwashed us to feel that our interests were not worth fighting for, to believe that the only option available to us was submission to the terms of others” (hooks 1981, 9). In short, the dualistic, either-or thinking that dominates the thought of Hegel and de Beauvoir turns out to operate as a twofold erasure of the black feminine—black women do not count as women in white feminism, nor as black in the struggle against racism. And yet, this alienated and marginalized position does grant a place of privilege in critique. As hooks reminds us, “it is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony” (hooks 2000, 16). Thus hooks shows us not only how dialectical thought produces and maintains the excluded other but also how the position of marginalization is actually one that can be used as a place of heightened critique and challenge to domination.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the conversation between Hegel, de Beauvoir, and hooks in order to highlight both the problems and the possibilities for liberation in Hegelian dialectical thought.<sup>24</sup> This boundary crossing and interweaving of ideas allows us to see the power of Hegelian thought in both its inspiring and degrading manifestations. Placing hooks alongside Hegel and de Beauvoir illuminates a great deal about the ways in which the dialectic can help uncover practices of oppression and inequality, while also providing a salient critique of dualistic thinking. hooks is not working directly in terms of the Hegelian dialectic. In fact, she eschews the metaphysics of dialectical thinking largely because of its exclusionary and elitist language, which produces an excluded class of people.<sup>25</sup> And yet, the Hegelian dialectic proves to be, just as it did for de Beauvoir, an extremely useful model for understanding the perpetual and dangerous exclusion of the black woman from full participation in human being. Hegelian dialectics clearly illustrate the workings of alienation and marginalization, particularly as applied to the natural, the feminine, and the African continent. Applying hooks’ analysis of marginalization to this supposedly necessary process, we can see how those who bear the burden of being placeholders for externality and otherness develop a unique ability to see the inner workings of power from within and



outside of the system.<sup>26</sup> For hooks, if one does not challenge the very heart of dualistic thinking necessary for the dialectical movement between oppositions, one maintains the very mechanism that one is attacking. This is why hooks refuses to place racial or sexual liberation over any other emancipatory practice because “all such questions are rooted in competitive either/or thinking, the belief that the self is formed in opposition to an other,” which results in the fact that “most people are socialized to think in terms of opposition rather than compatibility” (hooks 2000, 31). If there is one thing we can preserve from the Hegelian dialectic in this analysis, perhaps we should look here—because the oppositional structure of the dialectic is always balanced by the drive for compatibility. Although reason is always self-dirempting into opposition, it also moves to unite across differences into a sense of freedom applicable to all.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, we find de Beauvoir, hooks, and Hegel coming together on the transformative and liberating value of reason—properly critiqued, always troubled—that allows for humanity to overcome its exclusionary and narrow-minded conceptions of self and other, seeking to cross boundaries so as to unite all in freedom.

## NOTES

1. As Hegel explains in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this process is the work of sublation, or supersession (*Aufhebung*) which he describes as “at once a *negating* and a *preserving*” (Hegel 1977, 68).

2. Hegel lays out the necessity of the preservation of otherness serving as the moving principle of thinking itself. This internal otherness is what produces new forms of thought. The preservation of contradiction means that thinking will always be “restless” and reason’s syntheses will often be ephemeral: “It is the cunning which, while seeming to abstain from activity, looks on and watches how determinateness, with its concrete life, just where it fancies it is pursuing its own self-preservation and particular interest, is in fact doing the very opposite, is an activity that results in its own dissolution, and makes itself a moment of the whole” (Hegel 1977, 33).

3. The overview of the master-slave dialectic that I provide in this chapter is one that is consistent with the reading shared by thinkers such as de Beauvoir and Sartre, who were profoundly influenced by the Kojévian interpretation of Hegelian recognition. However, this interpretation is far from neutral and is admittedly narrow in focus. As Michael Monahan points out in his article “Recognition Beyond Struggle: On a Liberatory Account of Hegelian Recognition,” the violent and agonistic conception of a struggle for recognition, while present in Hegel, is certainly not the only or even the strongest reading (2006). In fact, as Monahan argues, Hegelian liberation through recognition actually requires a move *beyond*, rather than within, conflictual struggle.

4. By more natural, Hegel claims that the slave, in backing down in the life and death struggle for recognition, clings to life, which “is the *natural* setting of consciousness” (Hegel 1977, 114).

5. See also Robert Bernasconi’s “Hegel at the Court of Ashanti,” Adam Hutchinson’s “Raced Recognition: Hegel, World History, and the Problem of Africa,” and Darrel Moellendorf’s “Racism and Rationality in Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit” on the problematic place of Africa in Hegel’s philosophy.

6. Despite his appalling descriptions of Africans, Hegel still conceives of their eventual liberation through contact with the European Spirit. His treatment of the native peoples of the Americas and Australia questions even that possibility. Glossing over mass genocide, Hegel notes how the aborigines of America “gradually vanished at the breath of European activity” due to the “inferiority of these individuals in all respects” (Hegel 1956, 81). In fact, their small size, physical weakness, “passionless disposition, want of spirit and . . . crouching submissiveness” are why, Hegel argues, Africans had to be enslaved to do the work in their stead (*ibid.*).

7. As Robert Bernasconi has shown, Hegel’s colonialist impulses supported the notion that enslavement would be the first step toward educating Africans into the light of culture and spirit (Bernasconi 1998, 59). See also Bernasconi’s “With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Bias of Hegel’s Eurocentrism.” In his essay, “The Ruling Categories of the World,” Bernasconi shows how much of Hegel’s thought “exacerbated Kant’s tendency to see the existence of non-White races as making sense only insofar as they served the interests of the White Race” (Bernasconi 2011, 319).

8. And yet even this assertion is troubled by Hegel’s perspective of the unhistorical nature of Africans. Perhaps we should hold open the question of whether or not the African as *outside* of spiritual development altogether can even allow for entrance into the master-slave dialectic at all. As Paget Henry observes, “the African is the furthest removed from the European as self-consciousness. . . . Africans were outside of history, the domain in which consciousness is transformed into self-consciousness” (Henry 2004, 201). Thus, Henry argues, the African cannot even be considered a true slave since the slave is merely the duplicated self of the European subject and not a true other.

9. For example, see Mussett (2006), Lundgren-Gothlin (1996), and Bauer (2001).

10. For more on de Beauvoir’s discussion of the power differential between those who define and those who are defined, see Ofelia Schutte (1997).

11. As she remarks in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: “‘Each consciousness,’ said Hegel, ‘seeks the death of the other.’ And indeed at every moment others are stealing the whole world away from me. The first movement is to hate them. But this hatred is naïve, and the desire immediately struggles against itself” (de Beauvoir 1997, 71).

12. Contrarily, Debra B. Bergoffen argues that there is a tension here between de Beauvoir’s assertions concerning the universality of the desire to dominate and her philosophy of the gift and the erotic in “Out from Under: Beauvoir’s Philosophy of the Erotic” (1995).

13. As early as the first agricultural communities, “woman is associated with nature and this identification never fully abdicates its influence on the mythology surrounding her” (de Beauvoir 2010, 84).

14. I go into greater detail on de Beauvoir's treatment of nature in "Nature and Anti-Nature in Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy" (2009).

15. In the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, she specifically provides the examples of those whose freedom is truly imprisoned by "ignorance and error" including the Negro slave of the eighteenth century and the Mohammedan woman who lives in a harem (de Beauvoir 1997, 38). They lack the tools to change their situation and in some cases, even to know that their situation is alterable.

16. Neglecting to grant the value of individual sacrifice toward the goal of freedom, it is easy to build a tyranny on the backs of the oppressed. According to de Beauvoir's reading, "the value of the individual is asserted only in his surpassing. This is one of the aspects of the doctrine of Hegel which the dictatorial regimes readily make use of" (de Beauvoir 1997, 103).

17. de Beauvoir's early critique of Hegelian philosophy as a teleological march to a static absolute end is challenged by Michael Monahan's formulation of Hegelian thought in this collection. Whereas de Beauvoir fears the loss of individual freedom into an all-encompassing and inert goal, Monahan argues that Hegel "maintains a robust focus on dynamism, change, activity, and process over stasis and rigidity" which would challenge the notion of the end of history, politics, or philosophy (Monahan 2017, 10).

18. Additionally, hooks acknowledges the existence of pre-Columbian African explorers as a way of further challenging the idea that Africans were somehow less culturally developed than the Europeans who enslaved them (hooks 2004, 1).

19. My gratitude to Michael Monahan for helping me crystalize this point.

20. Something that hooks and de Beauvoir share that is underrepresented in this analysis is their commitment to creative self-transformation. Robert Birt explores the existential elements of hooks' work that sounds very much like Beauvoirian existentialism (Birt 2009). This connection between these two feminists surprised me personally when hooks contributed her article, "True Philosophers: Beauvoir and bell" to the collection *Beauvoir and Western Thought: From Plato to Butler* (2012), wherein she writes passionately about how much kinship she has always felt with de Beauvoir as a thinker and an intellectual, rather than excoriating her for her racist feminism.

21. Regarding the struggle for women's emancipation, hooks writes, "much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center... As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences" (hooks 2000, xvii).

22. Kathryn T. Gines does an excellent job showing the myriad problems with de Beauvoir's strategy of analogizing oppression. She attributes this problem, especially as it appears in *The Second Sex*, to de Beauvoir's problematic way of positing competing frameworks of oppression and thus raising the oppression of women to the status of most important (Gines 2014).

23. de Beauvoir goes on to quote George Bernard Shaw: "The white American relegates the black to the rank of shoe-shine boy, then concludes that blacks are only good for shining shoes," from which she concludes, "*the same* vicious circle can be found in all analogous circumstances: when an individual or a group of individuals is

kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he or they *are* inferior” (de Beauvoir 2010, 12; italics mine).

24. Such a goal is encapsulated in hooks’ call to freedom: “To claim border crossing, the mixing of high and low, cultural hybridity, as the deepest expression of a desired cultural practice within a multicultural democracy means that we must dare to envision ways such freedom of movement can be experienced by everyone” (hooks 1994, 5).

25. As she notes, her use of less obtuse language than most academic writing has a distinct political purpose: “written in a language that is far more accessible than much current feminist theory, it embodies the feminist hope that we can find common languages to spread the word” (hooks 2000, xiii).

26. hooks writes, “living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both” (hooks 2000, xvi).

27. hooks herself notes this drive toward unity as valuable: “As people of color, our struggle against racial imperialism should have taught us that wherever there exists a master/slave relationship, and oppressed/oppressor relationship, violence, mutiny and hatred will permeate all elements of life. . . . Freedom . . . as positive social equality that grants all humans the opportunity to shape their destinies in the most healthy and communally productive way can only be a complete reality when our world is no longer racist or sexist” (hooks 1981, 117).



## *Chapter Twelve*

# **Ideal Theory and Racial Justice**

## *Some Hegelian Considerations*

Brandon Hogan

Over the past ten years there has been persistent philosophical interest in the merits of ideal political theorizing in relation to the task of constructing nonideal theories. Charles Mills has been one of the harshest critics of ideal theory, and John Rawls' ideal theory in particular. In 2014, the *New York Times* online published an interview with Mills, "Lost in Rawlsland" in which he claims that "[p]olitical philosophy needs to exit Rawlsland—a fantasy world in the same extraterrestrial league as Wonderland, Oz and Middle-earth ... and return to planet Earth (2014)." Mills takes it that ideal theory is too far removed from concrete political realities to provide guidance in thinking about how to address longstanding, systematic injustices stemming from anti-black racism.

In what follows, I critique what I take to be Mills' strongest argument against Rawls and conclude that the argument is unsound. Additionally, I argue that Rawls' principles can be of aid to persons attempting to construct principles of corrective justice and to persons who must decide between competing corrective measures.

Further, I demonstrate that reflection on Hegel's critique of Kant's ethical theory can help us develop a more solid critique of Rawls. Hegel argues that while Kant's interpretations of the categorical imperative (CI) are plausible, Kant fails to justify the institutions—private property, for example—that make those interpretations possible. In parallel fashion, I argue that while Rawls' two principles of justice are plausible and reflect our current understanding of the concept of political fairness, Rawls fails to properly justify his interpretations of those principles. For this reason, Rawls' theory fails to provide us with a systematic understanding of the nature of our obligation to promote racial justice.

I conclude with a brief outline of a conception of political obligation based on Hegel's notion of reciprocal recognition. If Hegel is right, our political obligations stem not from our imagined choices in Rawls' original position but from being immersed in a political practice structured by relations of reciprocal recognition. For Hegel, the content of our political obligations, including those regarding issues of racial justice, must be negotiated and, at times, fought for. This Hegelian position supports the claim that persons who face racialized oppression have a duty to fight for social recognition and racial justice.

### RAWLS' A THEORY OF JUSTICE

I will presume that most readers are familiar with the basics of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. In this section, I merely wish to highlight those features of Rawls' work that will be important in the following discussion.

As Rawls acknowledges, *A Theory of Justice* presents an ideal political theory. Rawls does not seek to describe our current political landscape but to provide principles of justice that *should* govern our political institutions (Rawls 1999, 8). Rawls' basic insight is that our political institutions should be fair. Justice, for Rawls, is a matter of fairness. Rawls believes that fair institutions are institutions that are governed by rules that would be chosen as the result of a fair decision procedure. Rawls thinks that the original position—a circumstance in which persons decide on the norms that will govern political institutions absent knowledge of their race, gender, natural talents, wealth, among other morally irrelevant personal characteristics—is the best model of circumstances in which political norms would be chosen fairly. The rationally self-interested person who chooses norms not knowing their actual place in society, according to Rawls, will choose norms that are fair to all.

Rawls also takes it that the norms chosen in the original position are binding on actual, historically situated persons. Rawls writes:

a society satisfying the principles of justice as fairness comes as close as a society can to being a voluntary scheme, for it meets the principles which free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair. In this sense its members are autonomous and the obligations they recognize self-imposed. (Rawls 1999, 12)

For Rawls, then, persons are bound by the principles of justice because they would have chosen those principles in the original position. The principles, for Rawls, reflect each individual's choice as rational and free—that is, the



principles can be seen as chosen by each individual's rational self in ideal conditions. In what follows, I will consider whether this fact renders Rawls' principles binding on nonideal agents.

Rawls aims to present a theory of political justice that both embraces plausible, fair norms and demonstrates why those norms are binding on actual persons. Charles Mills contends that Rawls' principles, because derived from an ideal theory, are unable to provide guidance on issues of corrective justice. Mills' critique, in short, is that Rawls' ideal theory is too ideal to guide action in a nonideal world. In the following section, I explain why I believe that Mills' critique is misguided.

### MILLS ON RAWLS

As Mills points out, Rawls acknowledges that he is doing ideal theory only. But Rawls agrees that his principles would be seriously deficient if they did not allow us design and justify institutions that would be free of discrimination based on race and gender. In *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Rawls writes:

Justice as fairness, and other liberal conceptions like it, would certainly be seriously defective should they lack the resources to articulate the political values essential to justify the legal and social institutions needed to secure the equality of women and minorities. (Rawls 2001, 66)

Rawls, then, takes himself to have provided the resources needed to justify institutions aimed at securing racial equality.

Mills, however, is more interested in thinking about corrective, or rectificatory, measures. In "Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls," Charles Mills puts forward an argument for the conclusion that Rawlsian principles of justice cannot be extended so as to allow us to think more clearly about policies aimed at rectifying past (and current) racial injustices. This, I take it, is Mills' strongest claim against Rawls. As Tommie Shelby writes,

Mills's frequent complaint that Rawlsians generally say little about racial justice in their writings is not the same as the charge that Rawls's framework is not, without some revision, amenable to theorizing the rectification of racial injustice. There is a big difference between saying that they don't do it and saying that they can't do it. (Shelby 2013, 148)

An argument that established this latter claim would, by Rawls' own admission, be damning to the Rawlsian project.

Mills presents his argument succinctly. I will first quote the argument in full and then present my reconstruction. Mills writes:

The Rawlsian ideal, starting from ground zero, is a society with no history of racial (or any other kind of) injustice. So all we need is appropriate antidiscrimination legislation to make sure that this injustice does not enter the basic structure. But not only would this produce a racism-free polity, it would produce a *race-free* polity. (Mills 2009, 179)

He continues:

Now how can this ideal ideal—a society not merely without a past history of racism but without races themselves—serve to adjudicate the merits of competing policies aimed at correcting for a long history of white supremacy manifest in Native American expropriation, African slavery.... Obviously, it cannot. (Mills 2009, 180)

The argument can be reconstructed as follows:

- (1) A society organized according to Rawls' principles would be a society without racial distinctions.
- (2) If (1), then Rawls' principles cannot allow us to think more clearly about rectifying racial injustices.

Conclusion: Rawls' principles cannot allow us to think more clearly about rectifying racial injustices.

Mills' worry is that Rawls' ideal theory is too ideal to have any relevance to issues of racial injustice. It seems that Mills would do better to say that a society organized by Rawlsian principles would be a society free of racial *discrimination*, not racial distinctions. It is not at all clear that racism is necessary for the existence of racial distinctions. But I will not pursue this worry here. Instead, I focus on Mills' second premise.

In support of the second premise, Mills asserts the general claim that ideal political theories do not give us guidance on issues of corrective justice. If this claim is true, Mills' second premise follows as a consequence. In support of this general claim about ideal theory, Mills cites Nagel:

Ideal theory enables you to say when a society is unjust, because it falls short of the ideal. But it does not tell you what to do if, as is almost always the case, you find yourself in an unjust society, and want to correct that injustice. (Nagel 2003, 82)

Nagel, however, claims that ideal theory *does not* tell one how to correct for past injustices, not that it *cannot* give guidance on these issues. In fact, Nagel

argues that affirmative action based on race and gender can be justified by reference to Rawlsian principles (Nagel 2003, 84). Nagel's view seems to be this: corrective principles do not follow deductively from ideal principles but can be justified by reference to ideal principles. Affirmative action is justified, in Nagel's view, because it serves as a corrective for violations of Rawls' principles of justice.<sup>1</sup> Neither Rawls' principles nor any idealized principles will allow one to determine exactly how to structure corrective measures. But that fact does not take away from the usefulness of idealized principles for the task of *justifying* corrective measures.

Shelby makes this point as well. Shelby agrees that ideal principles cannot serve as a set of axioms from which principles of corrective justice can be derived. He argues:

What ideal theory can provide, however, are evaluative standards for judging when such rectification is *prima facie* called for—namely, when culpable violations of the principles of justice have caused serious and identifiable harm. The ideal principles (particularly the equal liberty principle) help to explain what was wrong with, say, Jim Crow and Apartheid. (Shelby 2013, 155)

Shelby and Nagel agree—correctly, I believe—that nonideal theory requires some notion of the political ideal in order to justify its existence.

Of course, we could read Mills as agreeing with Shelby and Nagel on this point. Mills' claim could be that *at most* the principles of an ideal theory can be used to justify corrective measures but cannot aid us in structuring corrective measures. We could understand Mills as saying that for this reason Rawlsian principles are of little help to philosophers who wish to think about correcting for past wrongs. Interestingly, Shelby agrees with this point, claiming that Rawls' principles provide “almost no help” with constructing principles of rectificatory justice (Shelby 2013, 154). But, even read in this way, Mills' argument for the second premise fails because corrective measures can be in violation of ideal principles.

To see this, consider Rawls' characterization of the two principles of justice for institutions:

FIRST PRINCIPLE: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

SECOND PRINCIPLE: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. (Rawls 1999, 226)

We can construct a few simple examples of corrective justice measures and determine whether each can be justified by Rawls' principles. Thinking through these examples will allow us to see that Rawls' ideal principles can be made relevant to issues of corrective justice. For the purpose of the examples, assume the year is 1870.

First, imagine that as a remedial measure for US slavery, a bill is introduced in the US Senate that would render all white Americans the slaves of black Americans for a period of 100 years. Such a remedial measure would violate Rawls' first principle. Slavery clearly violates the basic liberties of those enslaved and thus cannot be justified as a corrective measure. Even assuming that this corrective measure would be effective, which is doubtful, one could not both endorse white slavery and adhere to Rawlsian principles.

Second, consider a proposal that would provide former US slaves with land, money, and investments that would allow the former slaves to live comfortably, start small businesses, and save money for their descendants. This measure would not violate Rawls' first principle because persons do not have a basic right to have absolute control of how the government uses their tax dollars. Additionally, this measure would be justified by the second principle because while it distributes money to former slaves exclusively, it also serves to make those slaves—who we can presume are society's worst off—better than they would have been absent the corrective measure.

Third, we can imagine a plan to compensate white slave owners after the abolition of US slavery. The authors of the plan claim that abolition unjustly deprived white slave owners of property and that the United States should compensate the slave owners as a corrective measure. This plan, too, would fail under Rawls' principles because the two principles do not allow us to characterize the abolition of slavery as an injustice. If slavery violates the first principle, the abolition of slavery cannot also violate the principle.

We see, then, that Rawls' two principles can both help us to determine when corrective justice is called for *and* adjudicate between competing corrective measures. Clearly, no one set of corrective measures is entailed by the two principles of justice and more work can be done to form a more complete theory of justice that contains detailed principles of corrective justice, but this does not mean that Rawls' principles, as a part of an ideal theory, can be of no assistance to those who wish to develop principles of corrective justice. Mills' argument against Rawls, it seems, is unsound.

While Mills' strongest argument against Rawls fails, he is correct to worry that Rawls may not provide us with the resources to theorize systematically about racial justice. Rawls, I argue, fails to justify his interpretation of the principles of justice as forbidding racial discrimination. In the following section, I argue for this claim and demonstrate that this critique of Rawls on race is of a piece with Hegel's critique of Kant's moral theory.

## RAWLS AND JUSTIFICATION

Rawls' principles of justice, I think, are both attractive and plausible. They reflect our current, considered judgments about fairness. Additionally, I agree with Rawls that persons in the original position would choose Rawls' principles (or principles very much like the principles Rawls adopts). But, consider the person who is privileged by the *current* political order. Why should he take himself to be bound by Rawls' principles?

Rawls would claim that the privileged individual is bound by the two principles of justice, and thus should work to secure just institutions, because his rational self would have chosen to be bound by these principles in the original position. But, surely, the privileged person will ask why he should think himself bound given his *actual* position. Given that I benefit from the current system of white supremacy, our skeptic will ask, why should I work to secure racial justice?

Rawls' reply to the skeptic is necessarily limited by the nature of his philosophical project. *A Theory of Justice* does not seek to provide a response to all out skepticism about political morality but to provide a framework in which our intuitions about justice can be made more coherent. Rawls presumes that we all have a conception of justice; he takes this as his starting point (Rawls 1999, 17). For Rawls, the original position is a justified starting point for thinking about fairness because persons must decide from a position of equality in the original position and because the principles persons would choose in the original position align with our more deeply held convictions about justice. Rawls writes,

There is, however, another side to justifying a particular description of the original position. This is to see if the principles which would be chosen match our considered convictions of justice or extend them in an acceptable way. We can note whether applying these principles would lead us to make the same judgments about the basic structure of society which we now make intuitively and in which we have the greatest confidence; or whether, in cases where our present judgments are in doubt and given with hesitation, these principles offer a resolution which we can affirm on reflection. (Rawls 1999, 17)

Rawls also claims that we must weigh the outputs of the original position against our current political judgments. In circumstances in which the two come apart, we can either alter our current judgments or alter the description of the original position. Through this process of reflection, Rawls claims, we will eventually come to a description of the original position and a set of principles that we find acceptable. Rawls calls this position "reflective equilibrium" (Rawls 1999, 18).

For Rawls, the privileged skeptic, presumably, has *some* conception of justice, even if he believes that justice is consistent with white supremacy. Rawls' response to the skeptic must be that upon reaching reflective equilibrium, the skeptic will have abandoned any conception of justice that is consistent with racism and white supremacy. That is, Rawls will argue, upon reflecting on his most deeply held moral principles in light of the principles that he would choose from the original position, the skeptic will come to view white supremacy as problematic (Rawls 1999, 15). At most, then, Rawls is able to demonstrate that white supremacy is unfair, under a certain conception of fairness.

However, the process of reflection in light of the original position does not necessarily yield principles that are contrary to white supremacy. In fact, Rawls takes as a *starting point* the idea that racial discrimination is unjust (Rawls 1999, 17). However, if we take it as a starting point that whites are and should be treated as superior to members of other races, the process of reflection from the original position will yield different principles of justice. The privileged skeptic, it seems, would simply alter the original position in a way that would yield white supremacist principles. Perhaps he would add that persons in the original position are white or that persons in the original position believe that whites are superior. In short, not everyone's reflective equilibrium is the same.

We can see this point more clearly in thinking about how many, I assume, would think about the fair treatment of nonhuman animals upon reflecting from the original position. Many of us do not think that it is unjust to raise nonhuman animals for food or to keep nonhuman animals as pets. We could, however, design the original position such that individuals in the original position not only do not know their economic status, or racial identity, but also do not know their species. Understood as such, the original position will likely yield principles of justice that rule out eating nonhuman animals or keeping them as pets. But, on reflection, many would have no problem altering the description of the original position such that eating hamburgers and having pet cats are not taken to be unjust practices. In the same way, the privileged white skeptic need not reach a reflective equilibrium that rules out white supremacy.

This point is straightforward, and perhaps Rawls need not disagree with it, but given that reflection on the original position need not yield anti-racist principles, it seems that Rawls is unable to even begin to overcome any deep skepticism about the notion of racial equality. The skeptic can admit that if he were placed in *Rawls'* original position, he would likely choose principles that are contrary to racial injustice and that if he held a strong belief in racial equality, he would reach a reflective equilibrium in which he embraced Rawlsian principles, yet still deny that he is now bound by

those principles. The skeptic did not actually contract for racial equality, nor does *his* process of reflection from the original position lead to principles of racial equality.

While Rawls' two principles of justice are themselves compelling, it is not clear why the privileged skeptic, or the advocate of any social arrangement we take to be unfair, should take himself to be bound by those principles, interpreted in a Rawlsian fashion. Rawls' principles, specifically with respect to racial equality, are only binding on those who presuppose Rawls' conception of fairness. Rawls' project, it seems, does serve to clarify a certain conception of fairness, but it does not fully justify that conception.

This critique of Rawls mirrors Hegel's critique of Kantian ethics. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel specifically critiques Kant's argument for the immorality of theft. Kant argues that it is morally impermissible to steal or otherwise disrespect the property rights of others by appealing to universal law formulation of the CI: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (Kant 1998, 44). For Kant, stealing is morally impermissible because one cannot consistently will that all rational persons steal in order to achieve their private ends. In a world in which all rational persons acted on this reason, there could be no property because, for Kant, the very concept of property requires that persons are not entitled to take other's property at will (Kant 1998, 45).

Kant believes that persons are bound by reason itself to conform their actions to the CI. To understand this claim, we must first understand what Kant means by "reason." Kant understands persons as being bound, by rationality, to engage in two activities with respect to their commitments. First, for Kant, persons are obligated to criticize their beliefs by checking them for coherence. The belief that one can fall off of the edge of the earth is incompatible with the belief that the earth is round. As Kant correctly points out, we are rationally bound to commit ourselves to either one or neither of these beliefs because they are incompatible. Second, Kant holds that we are obligated by rationality to acknowledge that we are committed to those claims that follow from the claims to which we are committed. Following Robert Brandom, I label these obligations "critical" and "ampliative," respectively (Brandom 2007b, 1). For Kant, reason is constituted by the demand to critically reflect on and amplify one's beliefs.

Kant believes that the demands of morality must be binding on all rational beings—binding, that is, on all who are bound to criticize and amplify their beliefs. As such, he concludes that it is only morally permissible to act on those reasons that *all* rational beings could act on without undermining the social institutions they rely on in so acting. He concludes, then, that acts that constitute failures to recognize others as entitled to own property are morally



impermissible because it could not be the case that (1) all rational beings act on the reasons that motivate these acts and (2) there exists an institution of property ownership.

Hegel, however, is suspicious of this Kantian argument because he believes it unjustifiably presupposes that a system of property ownership *should* exist. For Hegel, the universal law formulation of the CI does not entail the justified existence of any particular system of property and, as such, does not entail that persons are obliged to recognize others as entitled to own property. As Hegel writes:

[t]he absence of property contains in itself just as little contradiction as the non-existence of this or that nation, family, etc., or the death of the whole human race. (Hegel 1967a, 90)

As Lottenbach and Tennenbaum correctly point out, Hegel's point here is that nothing in Kant's CI rules out the possibility of persons taking the destruction of the institution of property or any other morally objectionable end as their end, thus justifying all types of intuitively immoral actions as consistent with the CI (Lottenbach and Tennenbaum 1995, 223–24).

For example, assume an individual who not only wishes to abide by the CI but also desires to steal a car in order to go joy riding. Of course, the maxim "I will steal whenever doing so will bring me short-term pleasure" cannot be universalized without contradiction and, thus, cannot be used to justify his proposed action. However, the maxim "I will steal in order to do away with the institution of property ownership" can be universalized and, thus, can justify the stealing as consistent with the CI. As Lottenbach and Tennenbaum write:

The formula of universal law cannot tell us why we should not switch to such another maxim once we realize that our original one cannot be universalized. If the original maxim for the proposed action proves non-universalizable we have two options: we can either adopt a universalizable maxim that does not countenance the action or another universalizable one that does. (Lottenbach and Tennenbaum 1995, 224)

Hegel's point is that (Kantian) reason will not allow us to determine which of these two options we should choose.

For Hegel, the CI is lacking in content and, as a moral principle, cannot generate its own content, so to speak. As Hegel continues in the above-quoted passage:

if it is already established on other grounds and presupposed that property and human life are to exist and be respected, then indeed it is a contradiction to

commit theft or murder; a contradiction must be a contradiction of something, i.e. of some content presupposed from the start as a fixed principle. (Hegel 1967a, 90)

According to Hegel, Kant generally fails to sufficiently question the source of the content of our concepts and thereby fails to see that the CI can justify any number of actions. In other words, Hegel accuses Kant of understanding conceptual content as given and thus fails to see that the CI is subject to a host of interpretations. For Hegel, if any particular application of the CI is to be justified, we must first establish that the principles underlying that interpretation—for example, that a system of property ownership is just—are in fact binding. Simply referencing the CI will not allow us to justify the principles implicit in any particular application of the CI.

In the same way, reasoning from the original position will not allow us to determine which moral principles to treat as foundational and which to abandon. We are always permitted to alter the original position in the process of reaching a reflective equilibrium. Just as Kant presupposes the justice of the institution of property ownership, Rawls presupposes that in the first instance societal benefits and burdens should not be distributed solely on the basis of race. Referencing the original position itself will not allow us to justify this latter principle. Both Kant's CI and Rawls' original position must be interpreted and are subject to manipulation.

Unlike Kant, it seems that Rawls is aware of this problem but chooses not to address it because of the limited scope of his philosophical project. But because Rawls does not aim to justify the principles underlying his interpretation of the original position, he fails to offer a deep justification of our intuitions about the profound wrongness of racial inequality. And, it seems that Rawls is insufficiently critical about the *source* of those intuitions. Rawls simply takes it as settled that societies based in racism are unjust.

Just as Hegel takes it that persons should be entitled to own property, I, like most, take it that racism is wrong. Neither my critique of Rawls, nor Hegel's critique of Kant rests on an underlying suspicion of the norms each philosopher appeals to. Hegel believes, as do I, that in not investigating the source of these norms—that is, how they became normative—we miss out on important lessons about the source of normativity itself.

As I argue in the next section, normativity does not arise from the dictates of pure reason, or from reflection from the original position, but, as Hegel contends, from concrete recognitive relations between and among persons. In not acknowledging the role of recognition in establishing moral norms, both Rawls and Kant fail to acknowledge not only the source of our moral principles but also how those principles are extended over time. As I demonstrate, we can use Hegelian resources to better understand our obligation to promote racial justice.

## RECOGNITION AND NORMATIVITY

I have claimed that Mills mistakenly concludes that Rawlsian principles cannot help us to mediate between competing corrective justice measures. Above, I argued that Rawls fails to fully justify his principles and thus is not able to explain our obligation to promote racial justice. The original position, as a model of fairness, does not, in itself, justify principles of justice that exclude racism.

The privileged white skeptic wonders why he should think of himself as committed to promoting racial equality given that (1) he did not actually agree to Rawlsian principles of justice, and (2) even if he is committed to fairness and accepts the original position as a model of fairness, he need not also be committed to racial equality.

As we have seen, Rawls is content to take our current moral convictions as his philosophical starting point. In *Political Liberalism*, he writes:

We collect such settled convictions as the belief in religious toleration and the rejection of slavery and try to organize the basic ideas and principles implicit in these convictions into a coherent political conception of justice. These convictions are provisional fixed points that it seems any reasonable conception must account for. (Rawls 1996, 8)

I think Rawls is correct in this regard. We must begin political philosophy by taking account of our most settled convictions about justice. However, there is an initial worry that Rawls fails to address: it seems that a set of convictions is not justified simply because they happen to be *our* convictions. Rawls, it seems, provides the white supremacist with no reason to accept our contemporary, liberal principles of racial justice.

We can make progress toward responding to the skeptic's challenge by reflecting on the nature of reasons for action. At least some of our reasons for action stem from our commitments. If I promise to help a friend move into a new apartment, my promise creates a reason for me to help that friend when it comes time for her to move. Likewise, one who makes a commitment to promote racial justice thereby has a reason to promote racial justice. Failing to act on one's commitments constitutes a failure be the type of person one takes oneself to be. In failing to help my friend to move, I show myself as an unreliable friend, and in failing to promote racial justice, the person who makes a prior commitment to racial justice shows herself to not be the type of person who cares deeply about rectifying current and historical racial injustices.

If the skeptic is actually—yet not self-consciously—committed to the end of racial justice, he has a reason to not only promote racial justice but also promote our particular conception of racial justice. Or so I shall argue.

The first step in this argument is to establish that the content of one's commitments is not exhausted by one's subjective take on that content. In committing to help my friend move, I also commit to helping her package delicate items, to lift heavy objects, and to stick around until the move is complete (or near complete). If I commit to help her move, yet fail to assist her with any of the tasks typically associated with moving, I fail to follow through on my commitment. Likewise, in committing to promote racial justice, one also commits oneself to fighting racially discriminatory hiring practices and racially insensitive criminal laws, among other things.

If one is to truly commit oneself to some course of action, or some set of principles, there must be a distinction in place between what one takes one's commitment to amount to, and the actual content of that commitment. Absent this distinction, one's take on the content of one's commitments would constitute that content. If no distinction is in place between what one takes to be right, according to one's commitment, and what *is* right, talk of right and wrong becomes unintelligible, as Wittgenstein famously observed (Wittgenstein 2009, 98).

To put the point another way, the meaning of one's commitments, what one has actually committed oneself to in making a commitment, must be understood as conceptually distinct from one's take on that meaning. If I cannot be wrong about what it means to help my friend move into a new apartment, I can't be right either, and thus I can't actually commit myself to any course of action, if committing is understood as a way of binding oneself. To be bound is to be bound by something external to oneself.<sup>2</sup>

There is much debate, of course, about the nature of this external "something." We could understand the content of the norms by which persons bind themselves as mind-independent, as existing prior to the social articulation of those norms. This Platonist understanding of normative commitment, as we know, has its advocates and detractors. I do not have time to rehearse the arguments for and against Platonism in this context. I simply wish to register my suspicion of any form of Platonism that does not give a central role to human institutions in establishing the content of norms (and especially norms relating to racial justice).<sup>3</sup>

Here I will rely on a Hegelian, social conception of normativity, one in which persons bind themselves to norms that are articulated, extended, and enforced by human communities. For Hegel, one is only bound by a particular commitment to the extent that one exists as a member of a community structured by relations of reciprocal recognition. In committing to help my friend move, I bind myself by content that is articulated by the community in which we both exist. I reference that content in determining the scope of my commitment, and my friend references that content in holding me responsible for either failing to or succeeding in fulfilling my commitment.

In committing myself to any course of action or to any set of principles, I entitle others to hold me responsible in light of my commitments. In entitling those others to hold me responsible, I recognize those others as members of my community. And, in holding me responsible, those others recognize me as a member of the community. If I am to be genuinely bound by a commitment, I must recognize others and be recognized by those others. Absent this reciprocal recognition, Hegel believes, I could not have a coherent conception of myself as a self of any particular type.<sup>4</sup>

With this rough sketch of the nature of commitment on the table, we can start to think about the commitments and responsibilities of our imagined skeptic. Most persons who hold racist beliefs do not recognize their beliefs as such. Most people agree that racism is wrong, even if they have a very naïve conception of what racism is. Our privileged skeptic will likely preface his racist skepticism with the familiar, and infuriating, “I’m not a racist, but. . . .” The skeptic, as we are now imagining him, claims not to be a racist, yet does not believe that he has a compelling reason to promote racial justice or to adamantly oppose white supremacy. In making claims of this type, the skeptic explicitly disavows racism while making a racist claim. He disavows racism, yet fails to act on this commitment by advocating for anti-racist policies. He believes that his interests will be harmed by such policies and thus does not believe that he is morally obligated to support them.

If we imagine the skeptic in this way, we can easily respond to his skeptical challenge. The privileged skeptic has a reason to disavow racist beliefs and promote racial equality because he has so committed himself. It can’t be the case that the skeptic is not a racist and sees no problem with his benefitting from white supremacy. The skeptic does not alone determine the content of his commitments and the content of his explicit commitment to anti-racism makes him responsible in ways that he may not recognize. At a minimum, one who is not a racist, yet benefits from white supremacy, opposes white supremacy in word or deed.

Now, this commitment to opposing racism and white supremacy need not entail a commitment to Rawls’ two principles of justice. But if our skeptic accepts the original position as a model of fairness, his commitment to anti-racism does entail a commitment to interpret the original position in a race-neutral manner. As we are imagining the skeptic, he is simply committed to reaching a reflective equilibrium that is inconsistent with white supremacy. Of course, he may be completely unaware of this commitment and thus of his reasons to promote racial justice.

Now, the privileged skeptic could bite the bullet and self-identify as a white supremacist, or as a racist. In this way, it seems, he can escape the responsibility to promote racial equality that would stem from an explicit anti-racist declaration. But we imagine that the skeptic is also committed to concepts

like justice, equality, and fairness. He simply believes that these terms are only applicable to whites. However, just as the meaning of “racist” is not determined by the skeptic alone, he does not alone determine the meaning of “justice,” “equality,” or “fairness.” In committing himself to the promotion of justice, the skeptic takes on obligations of which he may be unaware.

The concept of justice has come to include racial justice, as the concept of equality includes racial equality, and a commitment to fairness entails commitment to treating persons fairly regardless of race. Of course, persons and contemporary institutions at times fail miserably at acting on their commitment to racial justice, but this periodic failure does not alter the content of the concepts under discussion. The skeptic, in committing himself to abstract moral terms like justice, equality, and fairness, also commits himself to the promotion of racial justice. The privileged skeptic cannot coherently think of himself as a just and fair person, yet also believe that persons should be subjected to negative treatment simply because they happen to be members of a particular racial group.

Thus, if the skeptic wants to escape his responsibility to promote racial justice, he will have to bite a huge bullet. He will have to either relinquish his commitment to justice, equality, and fairness or consider himself separated from the linguistic community of which he takes himself to be a part. At this point, the skeptic is out of step with history and his political community. His actions, beliefs, and commitments are inconsistent, and thus he cannot be the person he takes himself to be.

As I mentioned, the skeptic could avoid the responsibility to promote racial justice by rethinking the composition of his community. In Hegelian terms, communities are bound together by relations of reciprocal recognition. Even if the skeptic, as white supremacist, only recognizes other white people, at least some of the whites that he recognizes will recognize persons of other races, and will also understand an abstract commitment to justice to entail a commitment to racial justice. So, the skeptic will hold contradictory beliefs and commitments even if he only recognizes other whites. To remain consistent, to be the person he takes himself to be, the skeptic, as we now imagine him, must constrain himself by only recognizing other white supremacists. In this way, he can understand the content of his commitment to justice as constrained by the conception of justice shared by white supremacists.

Our imagined skeptic may not have a problem with giving up his commitment to justice or reimagining his community. Our response to his skepticism about racial justice can only go so far. The skeptic that makes either of these more radical moves simply marks himself as an enemy to racial justice. He is not irrational or inconsistent and it may be the case that he lacks a moral reason to promote racial justice. However, we need not take the possibility—and indeed reality—of a skeptic of this type as a reason to doubt our moral

norms.<sup>5</sup> Entrenched white supremacists are simply the enemies of those who have committed to the promotion of racial justice.

However, that anyone has a reason to promote racial justice should not be taken as a matter of course. Hegel takes it that the content of our abstract moral concepts is determined historically, through a process of struggle, negotiation, and creative moral thinking. We can understand past and present struggles for racial justice as struggles for the content of our abstract moral terms.

Once that content is set, persons who are committed to those abstract moral terms gain new, specific commitments. This process of struggle and concept extension goes missing in Rawls' work. Rawls' pleasant interpretation of the original position comes downstream from decades of moral and political struggle. In ignoring this struggle and its relationship to the content of morality, Rawls fails to explain why we are justified in taking our current moral beliefs as a starting point for political theory.

Rawls also ignores the nature of our responsibility to actively shape the content of morality. This responsibility, it seems, is most pressing for persons who are the *victims* of injustice. Hegel's conception of normativity, then, lends support to the claim that the victims of racialized injustice have a duty to fight for their conception of justice and thus provides a further justification for activism on issues of racial justice. Mills is correct in claiming that Rawls is unable to provide us with a full story about racial justice.

Against Mills, however, I maintain that Rawls' ideal theory is not irrelevant to persons concerned with theorizing solutions to racial injustice. As I mentioned, Rawls does successfully articulate the content of many of our moral commitments and provides us with tools that can help us to both expand that content and think more clearly about corrective justice. Rawls simply fails to justify his starting point because he does not provide a robust story about the nature of moral and political obligation. Hegel, it seems, can aid us in thinking about how to articulate that story more completely.

## NOTES

1. Nagel paraphrases Rawls' principles as follows:

That everyone be guaranteed equal basic personal liberties and equal political status; That there be fair equality of opportunity in the competition for those social and economic advantages that will inevitably be unequally distributed in a free society. (Nagel 2003, 82)

2. On this point, see Brandom (2009b).



3. For an extended discussion of a modest, naturalized form of Platonism, see McDowell (1996).

4. Hegel famously writes, “[s]elf-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (Hegel 1977, 111). For a full discussion of the modern Hegelian conception of normativity and personhood, see Brandom (2007a) and Kojève (1980).

5. I am sympathetic to Lionel McPherson’s take on this issue. McPherson believes that the normativity of morality is not threatened by the fact that not all persons have reasons to act morally. According to McPherson, “there can be reason to do what morality requires, where this does not depend on any contingent features of a particular person’s psychology—without this entailing that everyone is rationally bound by morality’s claims or at least has moral reasons” (McPherson 2007, 56).



## *Chapter Thirteen*

# **Oppression, Legal Reform, and Hegel's Natural Law Internalism**

Jeffrey A. Gauthier

As with so many other parts of Hegel's philosophy, his understanding of the nature of law is a matter of considerable controversy. Although he is most frequently cast as a natural law theorist, Thom Brooks has recently argued Hegel's articulation of the relationship between morality and the law is quite unlike that of either classical or contemporary natural law theorists.<sup>1</sup> On conventional accounts of natural law, determining whether a law is genuine requires a comparison between standing law and universal moral standards, where the dictates of justice hold independently of the law. While Hegel would agree with writers such as Aquinas that "true law" must embody justice, this apparent endorsement of natural law is complicated by his claim that the law is among the most important institutions that embody and thereby affect the content of justice. In short, morality and legality are interdependent, such that the moral injustice of a practice cannot fully "exist" apart from the judgment of the law. This unconventional and seemingly paradoxical nature of Hegel's theory has led some to criticize or even dismiss the account as incoherent.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than simply leaving Hegel's account of natural law as an philosophical oddity, in this chapter I aim to explore the complexities of Hegel's legal theory by bringing it into interaction with feminist jurisprudence, and in particular that of Catharine MacKinnon. More specifically, I intend to show that MacKinnon's assessment of the interrelationship of cultural perspectives and the law implies a complex relationship between law and morality, one that can both draw upon and provide insight into the nature of Hegel's own enterprise. MacKinnon's work is of particular interest in that it offers a detailed and concrete description of precisely how legal and moral issues become intertwined in times of social and political transition. The manner in which the law plays a leading part—for better or worse—in moral epistemology

demonstrates that Hegel's contention that law and morality are interdependent is more than just another obscure aspect of Hegel's philosophy. Rather, it may shed light on why perceiving the justice or injustice of a law is a more complex task than simply applying the moral law to civil law.<sup>3</sup>

In reading Hegel alongside feminist legal theory, it is not my intention either to argue that Hegel intended that his theory of law be employed in the service of political critique or to dismiss the tensions that exist between the explicit justificatory aims of *The Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and the stated goals of radical social reformers. As Michael Hardimon has convincingly argued, at least part of the project of *The Philosophy of Right* appears to have been to reconcile its readers with the existing institutions of their time, and thus to quell the kind of fervor that—in Hegel's view—lay at the heart of revolutionary terror.<sup>4</sup> I hope to show, however, that the theory of law outlined in that work and supported elsewhere goes well beyond Hegel's own stated intentions. I argue that Hegel's claim that law and morality are interdependent can in fact be taken to explain some of the concerns of feminists and other social critics in their criticisms of the injustice of certain standing legal practices. More precisely, I hope to show that when the law of the state regularly fails to address a harmful practice against members of an oppressed class, the true moral injustice of the harm cannot fully emerge within that regime. This is the reason that radical social critics cannot simply appeal to an external standard of moral justice to vindicate the reform. As Hegel would argue, the standard of justice itself must emerge (at least in part) from the internal development of the law.

### HEGEL AND NATURAL LAW "INTERNALISM"

Before considering how feminist legal theory might illuminate aspects of Hegel's thought, it is necessary to outline the central features of that thought, and how it converges with and diverges from other theories. As with other legal theorists in the natural law tradition, Hegel holds that genuine or true law must be in accordance with a universal standard of justice or morality.<sup>5</sup> An unjust law is not merely a law that happens to fail to conform to the moral law; by virtue of this failure it fails the test for *being* a genuine law. This marks a contrast between Hegel's account of law and that of legal positivists, for whom the existence of law and the law's conformity to universal moral norms are two different things. As Thom Brooks has argued, however, Hegel's version of natural law legal theory is importantly different from that of conventional natural law theorists. In the natural law tradition extending back to Aquinas, civil law's legitimacy derives ultimately from its charge of enforcing the demands of the moral law (Aquinas 1981, I–II, 95.1). While not

all natural law theorists are committed to a Thomistic teleological account, they typically share the view that the law needs to conform to some moral standard external to the law itself (such as reason or utility) to obtain legitimacy (Brooks 2012, 170–71). For Hegel, on the other hand, the law is its own standard: “What is *legal* [*gesetzmäßig*] is . . . the source of cognition of what is *right* [*Recht*], or more precisely, of what is *lawful* [*Rechens*]; the positive science of right is to that extent a historical science” (1991a, ¶212A). The moral standard for determining whether a law is or is not genuine is internal to the law. As Brooks observes, “Law and morality are not independent of each other; instead they are interdependent with each other” (2012, 172). The law manifests its nature as true law as it serves as the vehicle for actualizing justice and right in the world. At the same time, we come to know the actual content of justice (as opposed to its abstract form) in and through the progressive historical development of the law, even as the law itself is subjected to criticism on the basis of justice and rights.

It is perhaps unsurprising that many would find such an account of the relation between law and morals verging (to say the least) on the incoherent. To gain a more comprehensive sense of why Hegel could not simply posit the moral law as an independent standard for judging the law, however, it is useful to see this claim in the context of his broader account of morality and its relation to social practice. In his early essay *Natural Law* Hegel seeks to demonstrate (1) that only a “rights-based” ethical theory can account for the universal aspect of moral and political judgments and (2) that a rights-based moral and political theory must itself rely, however implicitly, on the prior legitimacy of certain institutions and practices to be action guiding. As I explain in more detail below, this entails that social criticism on the basis of universal moral rights will inevitably rely on certain normative assumptions provided by the institutions being criticized. In the end, however, this circularity need not be a vicious one.

In *Natural Law* Hegel provides a dialectical derivation of his own approach by dividing the ethical theories of his time into “empirical” (e.g., consequentialist) and “formal” (Kantian-Fichtean) types. The former derive their conception of the right from objective facts about the social world, and the latter base their evaluations upon abstract principles that are subjectively tested by a moral agent. Hegel argues first for the inadequacy of a purely empirical derivation of the right, concluding that it cannot succeed due to its inability to distinguish “the accidental and the necessary” in its conception of the right (1974, 64). Because consequentialist justification relies ultimately upon the contingent desires of moral agents, it cannot account for what he takes to be the universally binding (“necessary”) nature of the moral law. The failure of a purely empirical derivation of morality leads Hegel to conclude that “*a priori*ism,” the rationalist moral philosophy of Kant and Fichte, is the only adequate

starting point for moral philosophy—albeit *only* the starting point. In his most famous example (one to which he refers in later political writings as well), Hegel examines Kant's claim that a maxim to keep a loan rather than to pay it back fails the formal test of the categorical imperative (1974, 77–79).<sup>6</sup> On Kant's account, the wrongness of the action can be determined procedurally by means of a comparison of the subjective principle of the agent with the universalized form of that principle. Kant argued that a subjective principle to steal my loans when I can fails the universalization test because, were all human beings to act on such a maxim, the whole practice of lending would break down (1974, 437).<sup>7</sup> Hegel, however, questions why the elimination of the practice (and the consequent demise of the system of private property) should be counted as a formal “contradiction.” Even if we judge that an agent who intends to profit from such a system by means of stealing a loan has in some sense contradicted her willing,<sup>8</sup> the communist who fully intends to destroy the system cannot be said to have done so. Hence, the *universal* judgment that stealing loans is wrong stands or falls on the legitimacy of the system of private property itself.

Of course, Hegel did not intend his example as an attack on the institution of private property *per se*. As is well known, Hegel argues elsewhere that some version of the right to private property is necessary to embody the freedom of the individual (1991a, ¶46R).<sup>9</sup> His point is rather that to formally determine the content of any moral obligation, one must rely upon background assumptions concerning, among other things, the legitimacy of certain institutions and practices of the social world. Given the central position of the law in embodying the collective sense of right in a polity, the law will inevitably play a central part in shaping the normative assumptions of a culture—albeit in a manner that may not be readily apparent. In any event, the subjective or formal procedures of *Moralität* must be supplemented by the objective content afforded by the institutions and practices of *Sittlichkeit* if the former are to yield practical principles. Thus, in making formal or procedural judgments against a practice the moral judge must assume and thereby posit the legitimacy of other practices.

This point is of central importance for Hegel's understanding of the relationship of law and social and political criticism. To claim that a particular action or practice violates my rights as an individual, I assume that such rights would find respect were that action or practice to be prohibited.<sup>10</sup> I assume that the other institutions and practices of the system would, at least in part, serve to mediate my recognition as an individual. In other words, even social criticism is implicitly an endorsement of other aspects of the system. Indeed, if such criticism is to be effective in moving agents against that order, it must rely implicitly upon the legitimacy of certain institutions within it. Because the grounds of normative criticism cannot proceed entirely independently of

the actual practices and institutions of existing societies, even critics must rely on those institutions and practices to make their criticisms.

Although Hegel held that “formalist” ethics approaches were mistaken in holding that norms could be tested without relying on the untested assumptions of particular institutions and practices, he was equally insistent that the triumph of the subjective or formal principle represented by Kantian ethics was a genuine advance on other ethical theories. In *Natural Law*, for example, Hegel is even more critical of the attempt to base moral judgments for or against institutions or practices on empirical facts concerning their origins or effects. This is why subjective and formal judgment may be an acceptable alternative when the institutions and practices of culture are in such a degenerate state that reconciliation with them is impossible:

[T]he tendency to look *inwards* into the self and to know and determine from within the self what is right and good appears in epochs when what is recognized as right and good in actuality and custom is unable to satisfy the better will. When the existing world of freedom has become unfaithful to the better will ... the will must seek to recover in ideal inwardness alone that harmony which it has lost in actuality. (Hegel 1991a, ¶138)

Hegel held that this was the case in some previous social orders, perhaps most notably that of Plato in the degenerate democracy of fourth-century Athens (1991a, ¶138R). This served to vindicate Socrates' appeal to a utopian sense of the right that transcended the existing social and legal structure of his time. Hegel did not, however, hold this to be the case in his own age where he judged that the primary cause of social alienation was rather the failure to grasp the rationality of the actually existing practices.

Hegel's own critical moral assessment of the conditions of the Athens of Socrates reveals a second dimension of his analysis. Although such formal moral judgments must surreptitiously borrow culturally particular content in making the judgment, this fact does not mean that they cannot serve a positive purpose. One can (and must) subject practices from other times and places to moral scrutiny. The complex nature of such criticisms, however, renders them subject to difficulties not present for similar judgments within the social and legal structure of an existing culture. In his remarks on the ancient practice of slavery in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel points to the source of these difficulties. He begins by favorably contrasting the absolute condemnation of slavery offered by an appeal to universal human rights with various attempts to justify the practice by appeal to empirical considerations. In Hegel's view, any empirical consideration—whether to the enslavement's historical origins, to the slave's welfare, or even the slave's willingness to submit to bondage—fail to do justice to the fact that all human beings must be masters



of their own agency to realize their freedom as individuals.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the (correct) judgment that slavery is inconsistent with individual autonomy (i.e., with “the concept” of the human being) becomes clear only by means of the practice’s demise as a historical system and with its replacement by a better one. Hegel writes, “Slavery occurs in the transitional phase between natural human existence and the truly ethical condition; *it occurs in a world where a wrong is still right* (italics mine). Here, the wrong is *valid*, so the position it occupies is a necessary one” (1991a, ¶57A). Hegel’s use of “necessity” (*Notwendigkeit*) here should not be confused with the notion that slavery had to exist because it could not have been otherwise in some formal logical sense. Rather, the fact that it was a functional part of the system of needs (*Not*) of a really existing state means that slavery played a positive role in mediating the wants and needs of the agents of that culture as well. In the concrete economic and legal structure characterizing a slave society, the “wrongness” of slavery, its inconsistency with the freedom of the human person, remains an abstraction, an idea the “truth” of which was still in a latent or potential form. Put more generally, where the freedom of the individual is not realized in social and legal practice, and the wrongness of practices that violate that freedom, such as slavery, are not yet “fully wrong.” This complicates the moral judgment from another point in time that slavery is wrong:

[T]he claim that slavery is absolutely contrary to right ... is one-sided inasmuch as it regards the human being as *by nature* free, or (and this amounts to the same thing) takes the concept as such, in its immediacy, not the Idea as the truth.... But that the objective spirit, the content of right should no longer be apprehended merely in its subjective concept, and consequently that the ineligibility of the human being in and for himself for slavery should no longer be apprehended merely as something which *ought* to be (*als ein blosses Sollen*), is an insight which comes only when we recognize that the Idea of freedom is truly present only as *the state*. (1991a, ¶57R)

If nonuniversalist accounts fail to honor the human being by attending only to its existing social determinations, the advocate of universal human rights, by simply assuming that the human agent *is* free, ignores the equally pressing truth that a human being cannot actually be free (and so cannot truly “exist” in accord with the concept of humanity in Hegel’s sense) in the absence of those contingent social and legal conditions by which freedom is mediated. It is when the legal institutions of a state effectively eliminate slavery altogether that the unsuitability of human beings for slavery becomes an objective matter of fact, and the wrongness of the practice becomes fully actual. The assertion that human beings hold a right not to be slaves was once only an abstract truth that stood in conflict with existing reality. In such conditions, one can only partially grasp the full significance of the claim.

To understand the implications of Hegel's reasoning here we must return to his contention that it is only by means of the prior functioning of the institutions and practices of a social system that we can come to a grasp of the right. For Hegel, the modern moral critic's grasp of the *absolute* wrongness of slavery in ancient Greece is possible only because of her philosophical understanding of the material and historical transcendence of slavery, and her consequent participation in a social order that functions without slavery.<sup>12</sup> Access to the universal wrongness of slavery depends upon the moral judge's grasp of the historical failure of the practice and, as a consequence of that failure, her own flourishing in a society that is not materially dependent on the existence of a slave class. Because such an understanding is unavailable in the objective social and legal context of the ancient world, the universal wrongness of slavery remains abstract and subjective there—even among the slaves themselves. While ancient slaves surely experienced the misery and degradation of the practice, the fact that the practice found legitimation in laws and practices of the time effectively compromised their capacity to comprehend that harm as a moral affront—as a violation of universal human rights that could stand against existing law. That would require an objective world in which slavery does not functionally “exist.” Critically, for Hegel, in order fully to grasp a wrong as an injustice, a violation of the freedom to which one is entitled, it is not enough simply to experience harm but to be part of a legal and political order (“objective spirit”) in which the individual is recognized as having a claim against the harm. Moreover, such a claim to recognition can only take shape in a set of concrete institutions and practices that afford the individual agent the capacity to come to self-actualization. In the absence of such an institutional instantiation, “equal rights” and freedom are purely abstract concepts.

## NATURAL LAW INTERNALISM AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Returning to Hegel's account of the relationship between law and morality, we can now ask what it means for the law to manifest its nature as true law by serving as the vehicle for actualizing justice and right in the world. Clearly Hegel takes it that the legal prohibition of slavery is an instance of law becoming true law, because granting slavery any kind of legal status is inconsistent with the concept of humanity. Hegel writes, “in Roman law, for example, no definition of a human being would be possible, for the slave could not be subsumed under it; indeed, the status of the slave does violence to that concept” (1991a, ¶2A). In legally prohibiting slavery, the coercive force of the state gives effect to a universal concept of the human itself, and strikes down a false concept of the human wherein some are fit to be slaves.<sup>13</sup>

While this much is consistent with a conventional externalist account of natural law theory, the “internalist” aspect of the theory remains unclear. Even if the civil law is subject to the scrutiny of universal moral law, how is it that the law can serve as the “source of cognition of what is *right*” (1991a, ¶212A)?

To see how the law can advance an understanding of the right, it is perhaps most useful to examine a period of ethical and legal transformation, a time in which the sense of right is in upheaval. Hegel’s own writings are not particularly helpful here in that he generally avoids any (positive) accounting of social unrest pursued in the name of justice. Hegel’s well-documented criticism of the radicalism that followed in the wake of the French Revolution (the attempt to assert the “abstract form” of freedom against all existing institutions) plays a large part in his eschewal of such discussions (1977, ¶¶584–93). As noted earlier, Hegel took the task of reconciling discordant elements of society to their state (by demonstrating the rationality of the existing system) to be a central part of his social philosophy (Hardimon 1994).

Even if Hegel himself is of little help here, there are other accounts of social and legal change that can serve to demonstrate the interdependence of law and morality. In Catharine MacKinnon’s extensive discussion of feminist jurisprudence, some of her most provocative points concerning life and law suggest just such a relationship. MacKinnon’s exploration of the link between law and the legitimization of social domination is among the more philosophically interesting aspects of her work in feminist jurisprudence. Part of that work has involved exposing the ways in which legal remedies for sexual violence against women have largely failed to result in wins in the courtroom. As she observes, “The law guaranteeing sex equality requires, in an unequal society, that before one can be equal legally, one must be equal socially” (MacKinnon 1989, 239). On the other hand, MacKinnon has also called attention to the manner in which male domination acquires legitimacy precisely *by means of* the law. To the extent that the male point of view on women and male power over women becomes part of the legal system, it becomes enforceable by means of the power of the state. Law transforms a way of seeing the world to the way that the world is (MacKinnon 1989, 237). Likewise, as the state incorporates social power into law, this has the effect of erasing its appearance as social power: “Two things happen: law becomes legitimate, and social dominance becomes invisible. Liberal legalism is thus a medium for making male dominance both invisible and legitimate by adopting the male point of view in law at the same time as it enforces that view on society” (ibid.).

For MacKinnon, the law does not merely reflect a preexisting normative consensus, but plays a critical role in creating the conditions of its own justification. She writes:

Gender ... is lived as ontology, not as epistemology. Law actively participates in this transformation of perspective into being. In liberal regimes, law is a particularly important source and badge of legitimacy, and site and cloak of force. The force underpins the legitimacy as the legitimacy conceals the force. (ibid.)

Because the law engages the coercive power of the state, the perspective that the law takes becomes more than simply one "way of seeing" among others; it has the power to enforce its perspective as reality. It is worth noting that conceiving the role of the law as enforcing its perspective as the universal perspective is also reflected in Hegel's doctrine of legal punishment: the state asserts its point of view as that of the universal by negating or cancelling the false "validity" of a criminal act. In contrast with Hegel's ideal theory and its description of the positive role of the law in embodying the universal, MacKinnon's nonideal, critical legal theory focuses on the effects of the law's *failure* to lend expression to a genuinely universal point of view. These are, however, two sides of the same coin. If the law has a unique power to express and give force to the right, it follows that the same powers might be employed to legitimate the illegitimate and to render dominance invisible (MacKinnon 1989, 237). If, as Hegel puts it, the law is a critical "source of cognition of what is *right*," a falsely universal law can also serve to obscure the nature of right (1991a, ¶212A).<sup>14</sup>

MacKinnon offers a concrete instance of the obscuring of the right and its correction in her analysis of the divergent interpretations of the Equal Protection Clause in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).<sup>15</sup> The respective decisions of both Courts gave effect to a particular perspective on equal treatment, and thereby defined the meaning of that moral concept for subsequent generations. MacKinnon observes that what differed between the decisions was neither the concept of equality nor the lived experience of racial segregation but the perspective legitimated by the respective Courts: "Both Courts observed the same reality: the feelings of inferiority generated by apartheid. *Plessy* saw it from the standpoint of white supremacy; *Brown* saw it from the standpoint of the Black challenge to white supremacy, envisioning a social equality that did not yet exist" (1989, 240). The last phrase is of critical importance in coming to an understanding of the place of the law in shaping the content of moral concepts such as equality. A central reason for the nonexistence of racial equality was the fact that the law under *Plessy* defined and enforced a meaning of "equality" that was to prove inconsistent with the concept as it would later evolve. Moreover, *Brown* unleashed the power of the state to transform an as yet unrealized "vision" of equality into social reality by adopting a different point of view. While the inadequacy of the white supremacist perspective on equality can be explained *after the fact* by a straightforward appeal to moral reasons, the

political ascendancy of those reasons required the action of a Court willing to annul the legitimacy of the *ancien régime*.

MacKinnon's interpretation of the legal transformation that occurred between *Plessy* and *Brown* sheds additional light on what it means to inhabit a world where a wrong is still right. In her analysis, *Plessy* adopted and enforced a point of view from which real harms imposed on a class of persons were deemed illusory, or at least not rising to the level of an issue of justice. *Brown* reversed this perspective on the harms of segregation, rendering the injustice of the majority ruling in *Plessy* inescapable. In the wake of *Brown* it is tempting to conclude that the issue was simply one of bringing fallible civil law into line with the universal moral law—precisely the argument of natural law externalism. What this obscures, however, is the extent to which *Plessy's* encoding of segregation as consistent with equal treatment under the law affected the conditions for apprehending the wrongness of segregation. To the extent that legal judgments always *claim* to be morally binding and to the extent that they engage the coercive power of the state to enforce them, they have the effect of reinforcing moral blindness among the powerful and moral doubt among the oppressed.<sup>16</sup> On a Hegelian reading, where the conditions for knowing something remain unrealized, its truth remains potential and unrealized as well.

Of course, MacKinnon's theory does not primarily concern the operations of social power in the struggles of the past. Some of her most compelling theory has arisen in the context of analyzing the current failures of rape law in the United States and elsewhere. MacKinnon explicitly attributes the low rate of reporting rape as compared to other violent crimes to the fear among rape survivors that others will not believe that it was a rape (1987, 81). Moreover, she links the popular definition of rape to how it is adjudicated in the courts. Writing on the element of force in rape trials, MacKinnon observes:

Rape cases finding insufficient evidence of force reveal that acceptable sex, in the legal perspective, can entail a lot of force. This is both a result of the way specific facts are perceived and interpreted within the legal system and the way the injury is defined by law. The level of acceptable force is adjudicated starting just above the level set by what is seen as normal male sexual behavior, including the normal level of force, rather than the victim's, or women's, point of violation. (1989, 173)

MacKinnon offers a poignant example of the manner in which unjust background beliefs concerning what counts as "acceptable force" come to influence purportedly neutral legal standards of evidence in the rape trial. Just as importantly, however, these standards also come to play a pivotal role in establishing normative expectations on the social level. The fact that

obtaining a conviction in a rape trial is extraordinarily difficult results in relatively low rates of reporting the crime to the police. As MacKinnon writes in a different context, "The rapes that have been reported, as they have been reported, are the kinds of rapes women think will be believed when we report them" (1987, 81).

Thus the problem is not simply one of the civil law failing to meet the standards of the moral law, of women finding that the law is not upholding an already recognized moral right. To live as a woman in a world in which, as MacKinnon succinctly puts it, rape is not "prohibited" but only "regulated" has an impact on how one conceives of one's rights against being raped (1989, 179). "The implicit social standard becomes: if a woman probably could not prove it in court, it was not rape" (ibid.). Contrary to the standard assumptions of natural law theory, the judicial structure of society does not simply enforce or fail to enforce the already existing demands of the moral law. It also plays a critical role in shaping the content of those demands through its enforcement structure, making them more or less real.

Of course, to shape and give effect is not the same as to create from whole cloth, as legal positivism would have it. Above all else, the universal moral law serves as a source of tension in the midst of a society where institutions and practices that ought to be the vehicles of the right fail in that task. Much as Socrates could appeal to an unrealized utopian moral order in criticizing classical Athens, activists for social justice must make courageous appeals to a justice that in fact transcends their times (Hegel 1991a, ¶138R). To make the degradation of African Americans that followed in the wake of *Plessy* rise to the level an actionable injustice, activists had to appeal to a standard of justice that was not instantiated in the practices of the time. Likewise, when women do call the sex that they experience as a violation *rape* (knowing that the courts would likely not agree), they appeal to a standard of sexual violation that is at best only partially recognized in the law and in society at large.<sup>17</sup> Precisely because the oppressed must appeal to visionary norms of justice that are not upheld by the force of law, however, the appeal remains lacking in "reality" in the Hegelian sense.

## CONCLUSION

By engaging Hegel's legal thought with contemporary feminist theory, I hope to have shown that Hegel's internalist conception of natural law is not a mere oddity, and moreover that it can be used to explain certain aspects of movements for social justice that are not easily explained by other theories. Historically, the Hegelian contention that morality must be socially mediated though institutions and practices have often been deployed against those who

would call to upend those practices on moral grounds.<sup>18</sup> To focus on that type of case (as Hegel arguably did), however, is, to use a Hegelian term of art, “one-sided.” The fact that moral concepts must be socially mediated to be fully realized need does not render radical critique of existing institutions impossible. Rather, it underlines the central importance of legally institutionalizing the abstract standards of justice so that they can come to characterize the ethical life of the community.

In addition to offering an explanation for some of the more difficult aspects of critical legal theory, seeing Hegel’s claims in the light of the latter also affords a better understanding of some aspects of his own thought. In claiming that a functioning state that systematically fails to respect the humanity of a class of persons is a world in which “a wrong is right,” Hegel provides an instance of his more general claim that the “right” itself cannot exist in more than an abstract and potential way in a society in which the conditions for knowing the right are seriously lacking. Left at that, one might well object that Hegel is simply conflating the right with the conditions for knowing it. Seen in the light of movements for social justice, however, the interrelation of knowing and being become clearer.<sup>19</sup> Where the law fails to respect the personhood of a class of people, be it Blacks in the United States prior to the Civil Rights Acts, or rape survivors who lack access to justice in the courts today, society in general must lack an essential source of cognition for what is right. As a consequence, it also lacks a necessary condition for actualizing the full humanity of persons within that society. In matters of justice and the law, the line between what is and what is known is not so bright.<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

1. Among those who take Hegel to be a natural law theorist are H.A. Rommen (1964, 116), G.W. Paton (1972, 114–15), Harry Brod (1992, 38, 79), Terry Pinkard (1994b, 177), Dudley Knowles (2002, 128), and Thom Brooks (2012, 167–79).

2. Even Brooks, who goes to great lengths to show that Hegel’s claims are at least coherent, nevertheless finds the theory “ultimately unstable and problematic” (2012, 167).

3. This is the strategy famously employed in Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” in which King uses the classical natural law approach to justify civil disobedience (2000).

4. See Michael Hardimon (1994).

5. In this chapter I use the words “justice” and “morality” interchangeably to refer to a universal ethical standard that may or may not be embodied in law. I am thus diverging from Hegel’s usage in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, where he contrasts *Moralität*, the right in its abstract or formal sense, from *Sittlichkeit*, the right as it is expressed in the concrete institutions and practices of a community.



6. See also Hegel (1991a, ¶135; 1977, ¶430).
7. cf. Gauthier (1997, 17–21).
8. For this reinterpretation of the example, see Onora O'Neill (1975, 69–70) and Christine Korsgaard (1985).
9. For more discussion, see Smith (1989, 122–23).
10. Or “negated,” to use Hegel’s term, through a system of social retribution.
11. Hegel writes that justifications of slavery “depend on regarding man as a natural entity pure and simple, as an existent not in conformity with his concept” (1991a, ¶21A). Hegel further explains the distinction between mere existence and actual existence in the additions to paragraph 21: “Truth in philosophy means that the concept corresponds to reality. A body, for example, is reality, and the soul is the concept. But soul and body ought to match one another; a dead body, therefore, still has an existence (*Existenz*), but no longer a true one, for it is a conceptless existence (*Dasein*): that is why the dead body decomposes. The will in its truth is such that what it wills, i.e. its content, is identical with the will itself, so that freedom is willed by freedom” (ibid.). See also Hegel (1991a, ¶10, ¶270A) and Hegel (1975b, ¶7).
12. For some, the admission of any historically contingent phenomena into this judgment will render it less than “absolute.” On a Hegelian understanding, however, there is no direct access to a transhistorical immaterial sphere of reason. While Hegel agrees with Kant, Fichte, and the rationalist tradition that the content of moral judgments cannot be reduced to simple empirical judgments (e.g., calculations of the satisfaction of desires in a society), he argues that access to the content of reason requires a conceptual grasp of society and its historical development.
13. This is at the heart of the Hegelian concept of civil punishment as “the cancellation (*Aufheben*) of the crime, *which would otherwise be regarded as valid*, and the restoration of right” (1991a, ¶99).
14. Interestingly, this is consistent with the view of positivists such as Joseph Raz that the law always *purports* to offer moral reasons for acting: “It is not ... possible to think of the law as a ground of reasons independently of morality” (2004, 6). The “separability” of law and morality in principle does not necessarily make them easily distinguishable psychologically.
15. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896); *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
16. See Raz (2004, 6).
17. This is the “political” meaning of rape in MacKinnon: “Whenever a woman has sex and feels violated” (1987, 82).
18. As, for example, in Hegel’s criticism of the Terror (1977, ¶¶582–98).
19. This set of issues concerns Hegel’s central (anti-Kantian) epistemological argument in the *Phenomenology* that the concept of the object as it exists for a knower is not really distinct from the object itself. As Hegel puts it, “[I]n the alteration of ... knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge” (1977, ¶85).
20. My thanks to John Fritzman for continuing dialogues on these subjects as well as to Mike Monahan for his perceptive comments on the draft.



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